

SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

Alumnae Profile

by Julie Ricciardi

Janie Swain Molster '78HS

Owner and Principal

Janie Molster Designs | Richmond, Va.

Small Town to Big City

Janie Swain Molster '78HS was born and raised in Northeastern, North Carolina in the hamlet of Plymouth (pop. 4,000). For Janie, it was idyllic. Her grandparents lived near her, and she could easily bounce over to visit them or to other extended family members' homes.

"It was the sort of small town where everything I needed was a bicycle ride away, and if my chain fell off my bike during my travels, I'd always run into someone I knew willing to stop and lend a hand," Janie recalls.

That was long before Janie was grown and considering Saint Mary's for high school. Jackie Polk Edwards '59HS '61C, Janie's aunt, often shared that she loved her time as a student at Saint Mary's. Along with her parents, Janie soon agreed that Saint Mary's would be a great interim step prior to college.

Becoming a Saint

"Experiencing a Saint Mary's education felt a bit like pre-college boot camp," Janie says and laughs. "At first I was able to coast along academically, but soon found I needed to develop better study habits and a little more work ethic."

Socially, Saint Mary's was very nurturing, bonding, and incredibly fun.

"Being the youngest of four children, my siblings had been away from home for a few years, so I relished living on a hall with so many friends my age," Janie explains. "There were many special events, and my best memories are of piles of girls in a tiny dorm room and the uncontrollable laughter that always ensued."

Like many before and after her, Janie loved Chapel. It was a place where girls could take a deep breath and spend a little reflection time. A few of her friends who were new to the Episcopal faith were mentored by the chaplain and confirmed while at Saint Mary's.

"Chapel provided a haven for many of us," she adds.

Janie also recalls a bit of a 'wake-up call' when it came academic responsibility.

"That was courtesy of Mrs. Zepp, my Latin teacher," she explains. "I stayed up into the wee hours studying for a Latin final, dozed off at sunrise – and then slept through the exam! Once I woke, I raced to Mrs. Zepp's classroom to explain and apologize. She agreed to let me take the exam the next day. I didn't miss any answers, and Mrs. Zepp averaged my no-show grade of zero with the 100, giving me a final grade of 50 on the exam. And, I never slept through another test."

5 QUESTIONS FOR

Janie Molster '78HS

Designer and Owner
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BEACH OR MOUNTAINS?

Beach. Specifically Nags Head, N.C.

SECRET TALENT?

I twirled a wooden rifle in my high school marching band and I'm not terrible at karaoke.

DOGS OR CATS?

Dogs.

CHOCOLATE OR VANILLA

Chocolate in every form and particularly molten lava chocolate cake!

FAVORITE JAM? 2020. The old stuff is great, but I love finding new artists. My family loves music and we often rendezvous at concerts and music festivals. I credit my children with keeping me in the loop on new musicians.

Learn more about Janie on our website:
WWW.SMS.EDU/ALUMNAEPROFILES



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Life Beyond the Gates

After Saint Mary's, Janie attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH). An English major, she took her life lessons and degree to New York where her first job was working for Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a U.S. Senator from New York.

"I worked in his district office in Manhattan writing press releases, attending borough meetings, and anything else needed – like handling the Senator's wardrobe crises!" she says. "That's one of my favorite memories. He would often take the shuttle to New York for events, and if things became celebratory, his day trip would often land him in his regular suite at the Carlyle Hotel for an impromptu overnight. I would get an early morning phone call and be dispatched to the flagship Brooks Brothers store on 44th Street. Someone would be waiting for me long before the official opening, and hand off their signature blue shopping bag."

Janie would scurry the bag uptown, knock on the Senator's door, and deliver a fresh shirt for his shuttle trip home.

Living back in Richmond, Janie started her family and considered what her next steps could be.

"Interior design found me," she says. "I was bumbling about as a young mother, delving into my passion for food and cooking, pondering what I might do one day with my English degree, and mostly nesting."

With a modest budget and big ideas, Janie started tinkering with their family's first home – an early 1900s, three-story townhome in Richmond's historic Fan District. Soon thereafter, Janie started selecting paint colors for neighbors and then rearranging things in friends' homes.

"A friend gave me business cards as a birthday present, and I was off and running."

While most of Janie's work today remains residential, she says she also enjoys the variety her firm's commercial and hospitality work brings. "Though most of our projects are in the Southeast, we have a large concentration of work between Washington, D.C., and Raleigh, N.C."

Fast Forward, Today!

Janie's friendships and connections to SMS continue to evolve to this day. She and husband John have five children – four sons, John (Stephanie Henderson), Robert (Jenna Meade), Pierre (Ashton Ratcliffe), Swain, and a daughter, Isabel.

"Living in Richmond and having four sons, I lost touch for several years on the day-to-day happenings of Saint Mary's," she explains. "So, I was excited to reconnect many years ago as a member of the Alumnae Council."

Janie believes that being on campus is the key for keeping alumnae excited and involved. Now serving on the Board of Trustees, she says, "My most inspiring visit was a Learning Walk at a recent Trustee meeting. We spent time in various classrooms sitting in on lectures, labs, and discussions and we were *all* inspired and impressed. I expected the girls to be inspiring, but the curriculum and the teachers who are executing it are some of the best I have ever been exposed to. There was a palpable excitement for learning in every classroom I visited."

As a Trustee, Janie attends many campus and regional events. "There are always a wonderful mix of generations of Saint Mary's girls. I encourage anyone associated with our school, particularly alumnae, to plan a visit and take the time to tour the facilities and also sit in a classroom or two. It will make anyone proud to be associated with the Saint Mary's of today and become motivated about supporting it."

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Janie also says that she's hopeful the school can continue the pursuit of excellence for girls in education and personal development.

"Keeping a vital boarding program is important to me," she explains. "My biggest hope is to have a secure endowment in place so that the longevity of this special place is guaranteed for future young women."

We agree, Janie! Girls CAN rule the world.

Saint Mary's alumnae like Janie Swain Molster '78HS graduate with the skills, knowledge, and integrity they need for success. Whether furthering their education, pursuing professional careers, raising their families, or leading as volunteers, our alumnae are agents for positive change in their communities. Janie's story demonstrates the ability Saint Mary's women have to do BIG THINGS, no matter what age or stage in their life, and we're proud of her and all she's doing all the way from Richmond, VA!

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More about Janie and Janie Molster Designs, Inc.

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Firm Overview:

A full-service design studio with brick and mortar retail, Janie Molster Designs has been a fixture in the Richmond, Va., design community for over 25 years. Projects are broad in scope with a geographical concentration in the Southeast. Janie believes great design should "delight, inspire, and embrace" her clients. With a portfolio that ranges from family homes to boutique hotels, urban apartments, restaurants, and retail stores; Janie and her team are equally adept at transforming public and private spaces. "It's the mix of projects that inspires me."

Traditional Home, *House Beautiful* and the *Wall Street Journal* have all featured her work. The *Washington Post* cited the guest experience embedded in her "stunning redesign" of the tasting room at Early Mountain Vineyards, located north of Charlottesville, Va. "That's no accident," says Janie, a North Carolina native. "I like to think my rooms inspire Southern graciousness, whatever the region. Even the most sophisticated designs, when handled thoughtfully, should infuse a space with warmth and personality." Early Mountain visitors clearly felt the warmth: The winery's tasting room was nominated for *USA Today's* 10 Best Reader's Choice, winning first place in August 2016.

"The most inviting rooms look like they've evolved naturally over time," she says, capturing her design sensibility. "I'm not guided by genre, period, or pedigree. I am guided by good."

Recent Print Publications:

- [Florida Design, Fall 2019](#)
- [House Beautiful, March 2019](#)

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