

Dina Merrill at home with new role

BY MARY KLEMIC
At Home Editor

An admirer once said of Dina Merrill that she is "Glamour - with both feet on the ground."

It is this blend of style and sparkle, elegance and graciousness that makes Merrill the ideal hostess for a new TV program, "decor." The 13-week series will begin this fall on public television, WTVS-TV in Detroit.

Merrill spoke enthusiastically about "decor" at the Townsend Hotel in Birmingham Friday. She had been at Troy's Michigan Design Center, and other areas around Detroit, to do some filming for the show over the previous two days.

"It's a terrific idea," Merrill said over a breakfast of berries and chopped apples and bananas in yogurt. "I was so happy."

"decor" is a new opportunity for Merrill, an actress, activist and producer. Her movies include "Desk Set," "Butterfield 8," "The Pleasure Seekers" and "A Wedding." On stage, she has performed in "Trotsky's Garden," "The Importance of Being Earnest," "On Your Toes," "Angel Street" and "Any Wednesday."

"I've never done this thing before. I've played other people, not me. I never

wanted to be a talk show hostess."

Executive producer Linda Corley Webb, who was also at the breakfast with MDC's Susan Zinger and Ginger Vintzel, praised Merrill's style and grace as contributing to the natural feel of the show.

"It is very high design, not over anyone's head, very user-friendly," Webb said of the program.

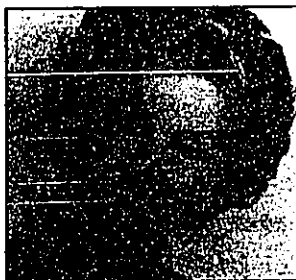
"There are design principles that go across the board."

For example, someone wanting to display a collection of beer cans could follow the same basics about displaying a Limoges collection, she said.

On the show

"decor" will guide the viewer through design centers around the country, tour celebrity homes and present designer profiles. It will highlight a room transformation in the before-and-after "Room Renaissance" segment, offer design advice and help viewers shop for fabrics and furnishings.

A sample of the half-hour program featured the transformation of a kitchen with Webb talking with the designer. The house was built in 1970 and looked dated, with a linoleum floor and a low ceiling that gave it a closed-in look. The



Dina Merrill

designer removed the fluorescent lighting, enabling the ceiling to be raised to a height of eight feet three inches, and replaced the linoleum with rustic American white oak. Task lighting was installed under cabinets.

In the "Tricks of the Trade" segment, design correspondent Debra Stein offered tips on how to make a small room look larger. Keep furniture lines simple and clean and angle a few pieces. Use monochromatic color, in different tones. Use vertical lines to suggest

height and have one strong piece, such as a statue, to anchor the room. Reflective surfaces (mirrors) help enlarge a room; have one large mirror or place a lattice overlay on it, or have glass doors on cabinets and bookshelves.

One tiny room was full of "don'ts:" overstuffed furniture, a solid table, a clutter of art work on the wall and too many accessories. Stein made the "shoebox into a showplace" by using subtle wallpaper, sophisticated mirrors, a smaller sofa and light art work.

Also on the show was a talk with furniture designer Dakota Jackson, whose projects included a writing desk for John Lennon requested by Yoko Ono (it opened like a puzzle); and a look at creative outdoor pools, including one with an arching wall of water under which to sit, one with a shape matching that of the house and one designed to look like a lagoon, with real coral rocks incorporated into manmade boulders.

Throughout the program, Merrill's interest was infectious, such as when she visited a lighting showroom to discuss chandeliers.

"I love design," she said Friday. "I

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