



QUEEN *of Versailles*

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In a town known for making “Dreams Come True,” it should come as no surprise that just outside the Disney gates a real-life fairytale exists, complete with a castle, king and queen. Jacqueline Siegel, well-known socialite, wife to David Siegel (the Westgate Resort timeshare mogul), and mother to eight children is building the largest home in America, right here in Windermere. Written by **Jana Waring** Portraits by **Katie Meehan**

It seems hard to define what is normal in the world today. For example, I asked for and received a \$130 electric toothbrush for Christmas. The Triumph, as it is appropriately titled, comes equipped with a video timer that tells me where to brush again and when I’m brushing correctly. I can never go back to a regular brush. I know I don’t actually *need* the Triumph, but now that my perception of reality has changed, I believe I do. This is what I imagine it’s like to be the wife of a billionaire. Because as Jacqueline Siegel tells me about her life, I am not sure she knows how extraordinary it sounds and how different it is from *my* life.

“Even though we are building the biggest house in America,” she tells me as we are touring her “temporary” home in Isleworth, “We want it to be a home.” Jacqueline didn’t set out to break any record; her good friend Robin Leach (of “Champagne Wishes and Caviar Dreams” fame) was the one to tell her first. The Siegels broke ground on the 90,000 square foot “Versailles” a couple of years ago. It sits adjacent to Lake Butler and is named after the French palace that inspired its design.

It wasn’t always palaces and champagne for Jackie (as her friends call her). She grew up in Binghamton, a tiny town in upstate New York, in a modest home with two hardworking parents and three siblings. The entire family shared one bathroom during her childhood and she remembers the inconvenience of having to wait in line to use it. Perhaps that is the reason “Versailles” will boast 30 bathrooms. Jackie will never have to wait in line again.

Looking to escape her small town and make something of her life, Jackie put herself through college and received a Computer Engineering degree. She landed a job at IBM. Her dream of owning a home valued at \$100,000 was well on its way to becoming a reality. But when she noticed her cube-dwelling office peers were counting down the days to retirement, she was motivated to move to Manhattan to model. After finding success there, she moved to Florida to compete in the Mrs. Florida pageant (and won). Then, as David explains, when Jacqueline walked into a party hosted by a mutual friend, it was love at first sight. David romanced Jackie and whisked her into his world: The world of a billionaire.

Coming home to a house full of at least fifteen people is typical for the Siegel family. After all, there are eight children and five nannies that roam the marble floors there. As we tour the backyard complete with a lakefront custom pool, three of her dogs, all of them with white fur, are jumping all over her. “We like white animals. See our peacocks over there? They’re white. We used to have a white tiger too, as a pet, but not anymore.” She talks of her peacocks and pet tiger in the same way that most American families talk about their family dog.

It’s not until I am driving her to the site of “Versailles” or what she describes as her new home (and I describe as a potential Disney resort) that it dawns on me that I am responsible for a beautiful billion-dollar commodity sitting in my van. This unsettling realization makes me want to floor it to our lunch destination as quickly as possible, although I am driving more slowly and carefully than ever before. It gives us time to make conversation.

“David and I did not exchange Christmas gifts this year,” she says, “We decided not to, you know, since times are tough.” For one second, I am rushed with guilt for selfishly wanting a luxury toothbrush. “How sweet ... and normal,” I think. Then, I see “Versailles” and think again. Perhaps there is no such thing as normal.

A digital rendering of what will be the exquisite ballroom inside the biggest home in America.



The following interview with Jacqueline Siegel was conducted during a tour of her current home in Isleworth, while visiting Versailles and over lunch at Bravo on Sand Lake Road with her mother Debbie Mallery and friends Nita Bass and Shari Crabtree.

What are the names and ages of your eight children? I'll start with the twin girls, Jacqueline and Jordan, who are two years old. Then we have Drew, who is a boy and five. Then we have Debbie who is seven, Daniel who is eight, David who is nine, Victoria who is 12 and Jonquil, who is 15 [and actually an adopted niece]. Everyone's name begins with a D or J, named after one of us. All three boys have the same birthday and were born on Memorial Day ... conceived on Labor Day.

Wow, how did you do it? That is a lot of kids in a short period of time. I was the most fearful for the first one. I didn't start having kids until my thirties. I was afraid because I was a model. I thought it would ruin my figure. But after the first one, I got my figure back pretty quick. I went to the beach and was wearing a bikini, like, a week later. So for the rest of them, I went into auto-pilot.

Nita: And she had them all naturally.

Yeah there were no c-sections. We love having a big family. Even though we are building the biggest house in America, we want it to be a home. Sometimes you hear fighting and screaming but other times you hear laughter. I think that when the day comes that I don't have that anymore, I'll really miss it.

Did you set out to build the biggest house in America? No, not at all. We were just building the house that we wanted for our family. Then we kept adding things to it, so it slowly started getting bigger. Robin Leach was actually the person who told us. We're friends with him and he used to have that show, you know, about those big homes. [She is nonchalantly referring to *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*.] Then other people starting approaching us to sell us things like security systems and they would tell us, too. It turns out it's the biggest house under one roof that will be resided in. The Biltmore in North Carolina is bigger, but it's a museum now, not a residence.

Do you have an estimated time of completion for the house? No, it will probably take a few more years. My husband was originally pushing to get it done so we could throw his mother's 100th birthday party at the house, but then she passed away. So, now there is less of a sense of urgency. Then all this stuff with the economy hit and the banks are in trouble. We're still doing stuff slowly, but we are also using a lot of our personal money to fund my husband's business and the Westgate Foundation that provides money for David's employees who are going through financial hardships. It is really important to us that we help these families who have helped us so much. They have children and we want to take care of them, too. So the home building process has slowed down, but we are still working on it.

What is going in your house that you are most excited about? We are looking forward to all the fireplaces and cozy bedrooms. There are so many different sections, so the home will not feel as large as it is. There will be two movie theaters, one for us and one for the children. Ours will look like the Paris Opera House and will have those private balconies on the second floor. I think my husband is most excited about that room. He just got me *Gone With the Wind* and the *Godfather* series. I have never seen those movies. The whole reason I am waiting, is to experience the movies in the new theater. My husband wants me to see them there. I am also pretty excited about the water slide for the kids and the ballroom. I am so looking forward to throwing some amazing parties there.

How many people do you have on staff in your home? We have five nannies right now. They each have their own assignments, with one specifically for the twins. One of the nannies is considered the driver and takes the kids to school, lessons and friends' houses. We also have a housekeeper. We used to have more, but my husband thought we should cut back because of the bad economy and the layoffs he had to make at his company. He thought we should suffer too. We even have our kids doing chores now. They take out the garbage and stuff like that. We explained that the whole country is going through a hard time right now and they have to pitch in. They understand.

“We love having a big family. Even though we are building the biggest house in America, we want it to be a home.”

What do the nannies provide that you cannot? For one thing, they provide safety for our children. Living in a big home, with two-year-old twins, it's difficult. One twin starts running down one hall and the other twin runs down the other. As one person, you don't know which one to go get. Or sometimes they can even get lost in the house. We have a big pool and we live on a lake. I wouldn't tolerate it for one minute if they were not being watched and ended up floating in the pool or something. They also provide love. For me, nannies are employees. But for the children—and I talked to a pediatrician about this—they are like extended family.

What is a typical day like in the life of Jacqueline Siegel? Every day is a new day—I have no regular routine. My day usually starts off with three of the four dogs jumping on me. One of the nannies will be cooking breakfast and that will wake the dogs up and they'll come find me. That's at around 5:30 a.m. Then I have breakfast with the kids, ride to school with them, exercise and get my husband off to work. And then I usually have a lunch meeting for charity, social obligations, the Mrs. Florida Pageant or *TravelHost Orlando Magazine*. [She is the producer of the pageant and a partner in J&S Media which publishes the magazine.] But then my day can change. My husband can call and tell me, “Hey, we have to go to Las Vegas this afternoon.” We have our own private plane. In an instant we can take off to go look at a property in Cancun or meet with a banker in New York.

Versailles

Exactly what does it take to be the largest home in America?

- 90,000 Square Feet
- 30 Bathrooms
- 15 Bedrooms
- 11 Kitchens
- 6 Pools
- 2 Movie Theaters
- 8,000 Square Foot Master Suite
- Two-story Front Door (weighing more than a ton)
- 3.7 Million Dollar Custom Windows
- Full-service Health Spa (with massage rooms)
- Indoor Roller Skating Rink
- Two-lane Bowling Alley
- Stadium Tennis Court (seating 200 spectators)
- Full-sized Baseball Diamond
- Underground Parking for 30 Cars
- Wine Cellar (holds more than 20,000 bottles of wine)

Information provided by Joe Bathalter, Project Manager for Versailles.

Has having so much money affected the people you choose to surround yourself with? I remember when I had my 20-year high school reunion. One of the friends I reconnected with started emailing me all the time. She wanted me to buy her a new car. I told her that I didn't earn the money and didn't have the right to do that. She never called me again. Some people are moochers - others are true friends. I have closed down my huge circle of friends. Now I focus more on my family and have a smaller handful of friends that I enjoy more.

Some people may think it's easier to raise kids having money. Would you agree with that? Money certainly helps. The kids need clothes and a nice pair of sneakers. [Jackie asks her friend Shari what she thinks.]
Shari: I would say no. Raising kids is difficult no matter what.
Both David and I came from modest beginnings. He was raised in a one-room apartment in Miami Beach. His parents would hang a sheet to separate the room so they could have some privacy. We never forget where we came from and that helps us to not spoil our kids.

Do your kids know that your financial situation is not like everyone else's? They do know there is a difference. They see it when they go to their friends' homes. They are not spoiled by any means. I do remember a funny story though. One time, we flew commercial for some reason, and one of the younger kids asked, "Mommy, what are all these strangers doing on our plane?" They are used to traveling on our private jet.

Do you think having money changes the way you must parent your children? It doesn't for us, because my husband is very careful about how he spends money and doesn't spoil the kids. We have to shut the lights off every time we leave a room. We drive regular cars and keep them for a long time. The only reason we own a plane, we actually own two, is so that David can run his business efficiently and easily visit his resorts. Before he owned all of the resorts, he could have had a plane, but didn't. It's not a luxury for us; it's more of a necessity. We believe in hand-me-downs for the kids' clothes. And if you look at our current house—to go through the whole tour it takes about 45 minutes—we use every single inch of it. It's very lived in.

How do you set rules and boundaries in your household? I'm not a super strict mom. I think I use my husband, like, "If you don't listen I'm going to tell Dad." I don't know if that's the best way to do it but it seems to work. I put the fear of Dad ... or God. [Laughs]

Were there things in your upbringing that you felt necessary to incorporate into your children's lives? Show the children a lot of love. Give them hugs. Give them praise. Something may not be that important to you, but it's important to them and you have to acknowledge it. Even if they pick a flower and give it to you and you're really busy, you have to take the time and say, "Thank you so much." My twins did that. They picked some flowers and I stuck them in my hair to show it meant something to me. [During the photo shoot, little Debbie Siegel did pick a flower for her mom and you could see Jackie's face light up.]

You've mentioned that you think Central Florida is a great place to raise a family. Where do you and your family spend time outside the home? We ride our bikes down trails and through Isleworth. My kids love having me around. We play kickball. Just last weekend, we went out on a field and had chicken fights and played Ring Around the Rosie. We enjoy the water parks and theme parks: SeaWorld, Universal and Disney. We can see the Disney fireworks from our backyard. We don't overdo it with the parks, but we go a few times a year to each one. After all, we live where every child in the country dreams about.

Is there ever a time when you take a moment to realize how different your life is from what you imagined as a child? My biggest wish for myself, as a child, was to find love. I remember thinking on our wedding day that I couldn't believe it took me 30 years to find my true love. David is the man of my dreams. I sat back and took a moment to thank God for that. I do feel like I have to pinch myself sometimes. My life is like a fairytale in so many ways.

> For a behind-the-scenes peek at the photo shoot with Jacqueline, visit www.playground-magazine.com.



Top Row (L to R): Jonquil, Debbie, Jacqueline, Daniel, Victoria
Bottom Row (L to R): David, Jacqueline, Jordan, Drew