

A sassy tool kit for women

By E.T. Robbins / News Correspondent

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MMeet the J. Lo of the home improvement industry: hip, hot, 34-year-old Barbara Kavovit, better known as Barbara K.

A decade ago, Kavovit didn't know a thing about hammers, plastering, or dry wall. That didn't stop this native New Yorker from starting her own construction company.

She started small through home improvement projects she landed by walking up to women outside of shopping centers, handing out business cards, and asking if they had any work she could do.

"Before I could blink, my phone was ringing off the hook," Kavovit recalls.

Kavovit says she got the idea from listening to the women in her life. She sensed women's intimidation by male contractors.

"Everywhere I went I was hearing contractor horror stories."

Kavovit enrolled herself in carpentry classes, and aligned herself with masters of particular trades — ones willing to mentor her. The small business that started in a shopping mall plaza blossomed into a \$75 million construction company.

Based in New York City, Anchor Construction thrived during the late '90s. Then 9/11 happened. The majority of Kavovit's work was in the city. Business dropped off sharply, and she soon ceased operations.

Kavovit admits, however, that she was thinking about changing direction before then. Despite her company's success, she found that when it came to home repairs, women were still feeling intimidated. Her entrepreneurial spirit kicked in again.

"If you give women the right tools, they'll want to learn. Now they're not intimidated, they're inspired."

Enter Barbara K's "Solutions for Women" — a comprehensive system of tools and accessories for the female do-it-yourselfer.

Her 30-piece tool kit contains ergonomically designed, lightweight tools that accommodate women's smaller hands and frames. Barbara K notes that the lightweight tools are in no way light duty.

"My tools stand up to any man's tools from a quality standpoint. But they look great and are so much more exciting."

Forget the rusty-red tool-tub contraption your husband or boyfriend has in the basement. This sleek, aqua briefcase is filled with everything from a 6-in-1 screwdriver to 6-inch slip joint pliers to assorted hardware such as nails and picture hooks.

Don't know how to use or even identify these products? No problem. You'll find an 84-page how-to booklet tucked inside.

Barbara K says she's creating a lifestyle brand, and that she wanted to create something a woman would be

proud to carry or proud to have in her home.

Retailers are taking notice. In April, department and specialty stores nationwide — from Bloomingdale's to Linens 'n Things — started stocking up on these sassy supplies. The toolkit retails at \$59.99.

What's next for this single mom? A television show on a major network, possible book deals, and a new line of products for the holiday season including "Barbara K's Road Side & Safety Kit."

But her first love will always be home improvement.

"When you improve something in your home, you improve yourself. You feel empowered."