



GOTTA LOVE IT
J. Douglas Bradford's Fine Furnishings Approach
 by AUTUMN RHEA CARPENTER photos by MOLLY DICKSON



J. Douglas Bradford

The mantra 'follow your bliss' definitely rings true for J. Douglas Bradford, owner of J. Douglas Design, Inc., a 21-year-old fine furniture and interior design firm located in the heart of Uptown. "Design has never felt like work," says Bradford. "I love it as much now as the day I started."

BACKGROUND

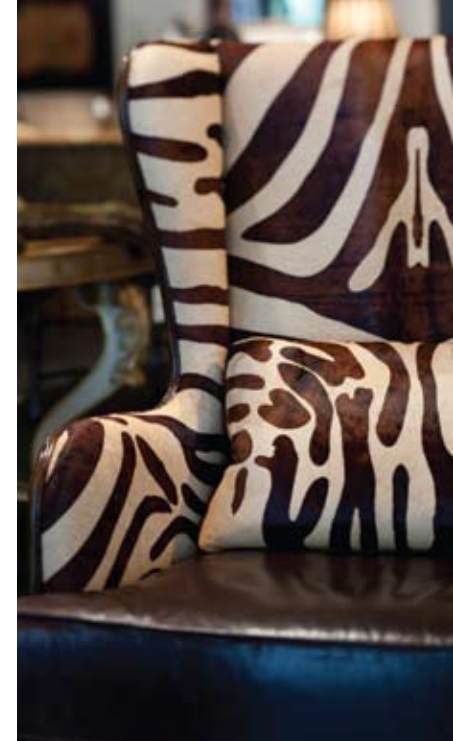
According to Bradford, his perfectionist mother sparked his design passion early in life. "Our house was always in order, and that lifestyle shaped my attention to detail," he says.

At 30, after working at various Dallas furniture showrooms and galleries, Bradford opened his own showroom. At the same time, he designed his first home and later met a real estate agent to put it on the market. After an open house, the agent contacted Bradford requesting that he duplicate his own home in a house she had purchased in Boca Raton, Florida. "That opportunity started it all," he says.

STYLE

In a design world where style must be categorized, Bradford's is difficult to capture. It's been called timeless, classic and uncluttered.

"I must understand my clients' style, not dictate my taste onto them," says the



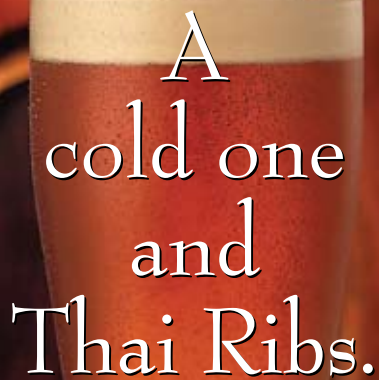
designer. "I do prefer to choose a few signature accessories, or a large piece of furniture that will become the main focus of the space."

Bradford's clientele invest in his classic design, which promises a timeless feel. "Trends are so fleeting that I don't use them much," he says. "Designing a home is such an intimate process, and I want a person to be able to walk into a room that I designed 10 years ago and not be able to tell the year I designed it."

He achieves flexibility for his clients by choosing interchangeable pieces. "I paint and often say that a room is a canvas," says Bradford. "I often go back and paint over a previous idea. I could buy a chair for a bedroom but it might land in the living room. Flexibility sets people at ease."

At the beginning of Bradford's career, he would often let manufacturer's repre-





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representatives influence his buying decisions. These days he goes with his gut.

"If I only like something, I don't buy it," he says. "I must absolutely love a piece in order for it to make it into my showroom. My taste runs from contemporary to traditional. I think many people share similar eclectic tastes - they simply need help combining everything."

INSPIRATION

Experience often translates into style, according to Bradford: "It sounds cliché but I am inspired by beauty that surrounds me. I once decorated a second home for a client in Maui and nature influenced that design. That experience remained with me and later influenced several other projects. Over the years, all of my collective experiences have defined my style."

PROCESS

Communication and negotiation plays a large role in Bradford's daily work. "I learn about the client's lifestyle and space usage," he says. "How will the room function? Are there pets? Kids? In-laws? How many people will be entertained? After the parameters are drawn, we provide room drawings and scale the furniture. It doesn't matter how much a client loves a table if it won't fit in the available space. For example, I worked with a couple who had a square dining room and loved this rectangle table. While I appreciated their vision, I gently explained that it wouldn't work in that particular setting. I'm merely a guide who offers alternatives."

Creating flow is another skill that Bradford offers. "I love rearranging furniture in my house to see how it changes the space," he says. "But I won't alter a room without considering how the other rooms are affected. I tend to choose neutral wall colors instead of bold, dynamic ones; pillows and accessories can achieve the same effect."

Bradford's current clientele are design savvy and influenced by various media outlets, including publications, HGTV and reality-based design shows.

"The media has really helped us because people now understand that interior design is a process that doesn't happen overnight," he says. "If my clients dislike an idea, I expect them to tell me. If one idea doesn't work, I'll come up with five more."

Including a mix of fabrics and textures is another element in Bradford's

design scheme. He often uses wood, iron, fabric, glass or marble to achieve balance in a room.

"Have you noticed how a bedroom suite where everything matches is flat?" he questions. "The eye doesn't know where to focus, because everything looks the same."

TRENDS

Although Bradford's designs do not usually include popular trends, he has noticed a few notable ones. "Established neighborhoods are discovering new ways to 'reuse' their homes," he says. "The structure of the traditional home remains intact, while the floor plan becomes a contemporary, modern loft. I love seeing that kind of innovation."

Audio and video cabinetry is another popular trend, he says: "These cabinets with a remote control lift allow couples to meet in the middle; the husband gets his flat screen television and the wife doesn't have to see it hanging on the wall. They are beautiful pieces of furniture that change how a room functions."

Amazingly, the recession has not affected J. Douglas Design, Inc. "By the grace of God, we have managed to remain strong in this economy," says the owner. "More customers are seeking quality pieces rather than the latest fad. People are requesting brand names and are more concerned about a piece's quality rather than its cost."

SERVICES

Along with Bradford, J. Douglas Design, Inc. employs three staff members with varied backgrounds. Two employees have home furnishings industry experience while one maintains a real estate background and an innate interior design ability. The showroom offers more than interior design, including custom draperies, room and building specifications, faux finishings, window treatments, fine rugs, art and wall coverings and audio and video capabilities.

Bradford's clients are loyal, due to his hands-on approach. "I am there throughout the entire project, from concept to completion," he says. "I'm there for every delivery to place the item in just the right spot. After all, it's my name on the showroom."

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