

Dallas is experiencing a boom in interior design the likes of which I have never seen.

Some of the top interior designers in the country are working on massive projects here, including New York's Peter Marino, who is redoing the expansive old Crespi estate on Walnut Hill. Local decorator Cathy Kincaid helped Carl and Peggy Sewell lovingly restore a historic Hal Thompson house in Old Highland Park a few years back and continues to assist with occasional updates. Mil Bodron is restoring a modernist masterpiece built by the great Edward Larrabee Barnes. And England's premier traditional architect Quentin Terry is building a Palladian house with interiors by David Milnarek on the site of what was one of Highland Park's greatest estates, originally built for the Prather family, between Preston Road and Lake-side Drive (to the construction of preservationists who mourn the loss of the lovely original house). People are building houses or expanding old ones, with square footage that is extraordinary even in Texas (one map out at 45,000 square feet). I personally adore houses that are too large, so I do like in 18th-century France where palaces are needed to house hundreds of courtiers and servants.

The one redeeming fact is that the current building boom has brought out the best in Dallas' interior talents. The bar has been raised, and a lot of decorators are producing some great work. The list goes on and on. But there is a lot of competition for the handful of truly important projects among a handful of important Dallas decorators. We should get this clear right away: The business of decorating is ultimately just that—a business. A high-end business, acquired with a great deal of savvy, perhaps. I understand, however, it is a seeking competition, just like any big business, one with client poaching and espionage. But let's ignore the back-story intrigue and talk about the work.

I revel in the talents of a handful of locals. And even though some people feel compelled to import serious big guns from New York, Los Angeles and London, Dallas decorators are getting their fair share of national attention in top magazines. And frankly, I am rather unimpressed by the work being done here by the imported decorators. It appears to me that they are simply spreading as much of their client's money as possible. As a contributing editor for *Southern Accents* and *PaperCity* magazines, and *House & Garden* magazine before that, I may not see 50 houses a year to be published, and of that, about two are actually photographed. Competition for clients and publication in the top magazines is rife. I've found that Dallas decorators have very little, if any, overlap in their styles. Let's pause for a moment to talk about the term "decorator." I never use the word

"designer." If "decorator" was good enough for Billy Baldwin, it's good enough for me. The following is a list of eight local decorators whose work I admire and who have during the years received the most press attention.

In no particular order, they are: Paul Garzotto, Jan Showers, Emily Summers, Joie McCarthy, Mil Bodron, Michelle Nussbaumer, James McInroe and Cathy Kincaid. I'll give two nods as well to Elizabeth Smith and Cathy Freeman-Phillips (both of whom only decorate for themselves, but well enough to be published).

Paul Garzotto is the surviving partner of the nationally recognized firm Green Garzotto. The late partner Margaret Green was Dallas' divorcee of decorating, not only Southern Style magazine's



Emily Summers

The designing blitz has hit Dallas. Take cover, preferably under something stylish, such as a yard of Rogers & Goffigon periwinkle satin.



Michelle Nussbaumer

both impeccable and educated. So is Garzotto's. Countless working decorators passed through the office of the formidable Mrs. Green, but Paul Garzotto was the only one she made a partner. I once asked her why she had chosen Paul, and she replied in that lovely honey-toned Southern voice: "Paul's from New Orleans, has Italian forage and knows his history. Do the math." One of the most soft-spoken and gentlest of men, Paul is an absolute genius with mixing colors, periods, fabrics and antiques. His firm is probably considered the "Most Old Guard and Generel," but Paul can speak in many other languages besides the traditional. He's completing a knockout contemporary

house in Austin, which he has filled with everything from mid-century modern and slick custom tapestries to 18th-century European. The scope of his work is hard to measure—I once shot a single project of his for three separate *Southern Accents* stories and still did not show everything there was in his head. It wasn't because the house was huge; it was because it was so lyrical and perfect. His work has also appeared in *House & Garden*, *Elle Decor* and *Veranda*.

Jan Showers was the second decorator I met when I returned to Dallas from living in New York, and I must admit she was immediately one of my personal favorites. As blonde and petite as her interior, she pioneered a mix of French mid-century light wood and mirrored furniture, lavish fabrics and pale colors, which had never been seen before in this chintzy and malarkey-crazed town. Not that there is anything wrong with chintz, but enough is enough. The house she decorated for Ange and Bill Barrett is herafunking in its controlled mix of period pieces, custom upholstery, and gilt: it's like sitting inside a big butter cream. And the all-white living room for Paula and Kerry North reminds me of the famous Tobin



James McInroe

Clark bedroom in California done by Steve Magham in the early part of the century. Like the Magham room, it isn't really all white, but that's the effect. Here, Showers also shows her mastery at working with fine art: as the room contains a wonderful painting by Helen Frankenthaline, Showers also creates table vignettes of accessories that are perfect without being precious. I still think Showers produces the sexiest bed-rooms on earth. Fabulous dressing tables laden with Venetian glass-pottery bottles and bowls dressed with loads of satins and linens. She knows her work like a great customer. She has also taken a step forward in her new house in Dallas. While pale fruitwoods and muted "no color" colors are still her signature, Showers has smoothed up all the pale with splashes of color and character throughout the house. And in lieu of so many mirrors, she now uses interesting art here and there—from a wonderful old oil landscape in the

course we think they're chic. And they are. What I'm anxious to see in her own house—a remarkable 1960s house in Highland Park that's almost finished and which promises to reveal another level in her professional development. But she doesn't confine herself to only 1960s furniture. She has amazing resources and is currently buying pieces by seminal Italian architects Carlo Scarpa, Carlo de Carli and Carlo Molteni, whose work, spanned from the '30s through the '50s. She loves furniture that speaks in a sculptural way, loves long-term relationships with her clients and taking her clients down decorating roads they never knew they might go. *House Beautiful*, *Metropolitan House* and *Interiors Design* have also published her work.

Joie McCarthy is the third in the trinitarian of beautiful blondes, an international shopper and observer: she is fearless in her use of lavish color mixed with antiques. The

jaunty yellow hall and its screaming red library in a project done in 1966, now occupied by Julie and James Silkock, is still so correct that *House Beautiful* published the house this past August. McCarthy's style just doesn't date. It is correct to a T, but never dull or expected. Her client list is top drawer (she that with your fresh firmly clenched together), in terms of both taste and the ability to acquire the best. In short, McCarthy is the leader in restrained elegance. Her work is reminiscent of the venerable New York firm Parish-Hadley, founded by Sister Parish. But McCarthy is not limited to any one style. Her goal is to have the house represent the client with the best possible taste. One of her projects is all parchment, and she is currently working on a couple of projects with 1920s to 1940s French furnishings and accessories. Like Garzotto, McCarthy is educated in the field and therefore fluent in many decorating languages. For those who require a decorator with a strong sense of the appropriate (and there are many who do), McCarthy is the perfect choice. *Southern Accents*, *Veranda* and *Traditional Homes* have also published her work.

Cathy Kincaid is a real straight shooter. She is also incredibly loyal. When I previously left *Southern Accents* to go to *House & Garden* (I later returned), I asked her if she would let me look at her work. "Sure," she answered firmly. "I'm sticking with *Southern Accents*." And she has. Kincaid decorated the absolutely perfect house for Carl and Peggy Sewell, which is



Joie McCarthy



Mil Bodron

a restoration of architect Hal Thompson's best work. In it, Kincaid has mixed blue and white porcelains, Eastern ethnic and 18th-century French and Italian pieces with her wonderful sense of color. Whoever would have thought of hanging and placing those porcelains over and in front of Chinese export paper? Most people leave it unadorned. Not too long ago, she landed a big London couple. Kincaid has enough confidence to know that she couldn't do everything on that project long distance, so she brought in the venerable English decorating house of Colefax & Fowler to work with her. That's confidence and pragmatism, illustrating that she put the client's best interest before her own ego.

Yes, she's direct, so if you want a decorator who favors over you, she's probably not the right choice. But if you trust her and just let her do her work, the results are lovely, comfortable and just enough of a stretch beyond the traditional to be innovative.

Michelle Nussbaumer's Dallas house, a superb 1940s classic with a series of rooms in the French style (each opens onto the next, rather than falling off hallways), was first published in *PaperCity* and her work has also appeared in *Metropolitan House*, *House Beautiful*, *House & Garden* and *World of Interiors*, is set to appear in *Southern Accents*. Her home is a masterpiece of layering, textures and vignettes. Nussbaumer, a Dallas native married to a rather remarkable Swiss writer (his career is a whole other fascinating story) and the mother of four children, splits her time between Dallas, New York, Rome and Los Angeles, among other places. Her style defies every decorating convention I know. She buys things (often in huge quanti-

ties) after hunting through estate sales and major auctions nationwide, along with consulting her international contacts. (Her store, Ceylon et Cie, is a treasure that holds the overflow from her buying trips. The best word I can use to describe it is "wonky," which indicates a sense of play and a fervid imagination.) Nussbaumer's style is one of layering. She fearlessly piles it on and arranges vignettes and tableaux until just the right balance is struck. First furniture is placed in a way that is logical to each space, but then watch out—a veritable caravan of things from Chinese porcelains to Indian saris arrives and begins to cover every available surface. I admire her courage and her unique eye. Few decorators have the intrinsic ability



Paul Garzotto



Jan Showers

they visited. They weren't buying souvenir Eiffel Towers, either. They brought home the best that each country had to offer, including French furniture, paintings and objets de vertu, Moghul and Raj Indian carved marble furniture, Chinese porcelains... You name it. The Victorians were mad for stuff, and so is Nussbaumer. She possesses an innate confidence that reflects an eye that judges every piece on its own merits.

James McInroe trained under the late Tony Foy, who was an extreme modernist. He has just left his more recent association with Jan Showers to go out on his

own. A bit of a wild card, McInroe's style is basically contemporary in nature, but with a twist that I think came from his work with Showers. He uses a classically modernist furniture plan, but the pieces can be anything from 18th-century continental to 1940s French and pure contemporary. It shows the influence of both Foy and Showers, but his use of color is completely his own. He has gone from living in a one-room apartment painted an odd olive green to an apartment with a choco-

late living room, an aqua dining room, a tomato-red kitchen and a chartreuse bedroom. It is a collision of colors, to be sure, but McInroe pulls it off like no other. This apartment was published in *PaperCity* in July and is tabbed to be photographed for *Elle Decor*. His own furniture taste runs from period to mid-century modern. His look can best be described as Billy Baldwin on a mind-altering drug. McInroe's best work is yet to come, and he's definitely someone to watch.

Mil Bodron is the Jean Schlumberger of interiors (if you don't know who that is, call and ask Tiffany & Co.; I'll wait). Bodron hails from Monroe, Louisiana, and

all he thinks about is work. With architect and business partner Svend Fruit, Bodron creates houses that are, quite simply, works of art. He is not without eccentricity, however, so his clients have to be made of certain stuff. First, Bodron likes to become one with his work. The house and the people in it are his muse, so often he moves in. Some clients put him up in the guesthouse out back, but he may move into the home itself, if it is empty. The good news is he's a perfectionist who only uses the best of everything. He worked with Emily Summers on the interiors of Rusty and Deedie Rose's Antoine

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Cathy Kincaid

Predeck-designed house. With Svend Fruit, his clients include Brooke and Frank Aldridge, Mark and Jill Davenport, and Naomi and Larry Lebowitz, who all have the same high standards as Bodron. The result is more like a piece of jewelry than interior and architecture. Everything is exquisitely detailed, even down to the beautiful door hinges in stainless steel or nickel plate. Though he leans toward the look of the later part of this century—with pieces by American greats such as Edward Wormley for Dunbar, Tommi Parzinger and Billy Haines—Bodron also has discovered the work of current designers such as Barcelona's Jaime Treserra, whose furniture is as lean and flowless as a Ferrari. Bodron works to bring every old house back to life and new construction is perfection. I'll even go out on a limb and compare his work to that of the French mid-century genius Jean-Michel Frank and Frances Elkins. His approach may appear a bit eccentric, but I'm convinced that Bodron is creating some of Dallas' future interior landmarks. *Southern Accents* and *Metropolitan House* have published his work.

Dallas' Eight Reigning Decorating Royalty

Our Man at Large: David Feld