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DREAM DESIGNERS

Meet a few of Montgomery's hottest interior designers.

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These Montgomery interior designers have brought their taste and talents to bear in their retail stores as well as in people's homes, giving you the opportunity to get your hands on some of the area's finest furniture and accessories in addition to their design expertise.

Bill Bargainer was born to be an interior designer. "I grew up in a family of five, and no one cared how the house looked except me," he said. "It's a God-given talent." He helped friends and family over the years but never dreamed he would get the chance to do it professionally.

It was after years in a completely different field that he heard about a part-time opening in a showroom from a friend. "It blew up from there," he said.

Bill has been in business for himself since 2001. He's all about client satisfaction, which seems to have an ever-increasing emphasis on functionality. "People want rooms that they are actually going to live in. It's got to look great, believe me. But it's got to be functional."

Because Bill knows what it's like to enjoy your living space, he will do whatever it takes to give others the joy of that experience. "I love nothing more than coming home to my house," he said. "You've got to surround yourself with what you enjoy. There should be somewhere you can go at the end of the day to relax."

Charlotte Gaston said people come into her furniture store just to visit all the time. "We want people to feel like our place is an extension of their home," she said. "They are always welcome here." And the look of the store reflects it, complete with a cozy fireplace that Montgomery's warm weather doesn't call for much.

Charlotte said having her clients become dear friends is one of the greatest parts of her job, and she gives her best to each one. "You spend so much time in your home," she said. "It should be a comfort zone." People ought to live with colors that make them feel good, whether they are warm or cool. "I enjoy my reds as much as I do my soft beiges and teals," she said.

When it comes to her personal taste, Charlotte is traditional with an eclectic blend. She likes clear colors more than muddy ones and uses neutral shades with touches of

teals, reds and blacks to accent.

But when it comes to working with her clients, it's all about what they like. "It's their home not mine," she said. She's simply there to help keep them from making mistakes, which most often has to do with scale.

Even though you could use the same piece of fabric in three different homes with completely different looks, she very rarely re-orders. "There are too many new things out there not to use them," she said. "I want to give them something you won't see on every street corner." Because each person is different, so is each room she designs. "And that's the beauty of it," she said.

Cindy Bargainer and her husband Jeff own a furniture and accessory store that also offers full-scales design services at The Waters.

Her personal style is one of relaxed elegance, which is sometimes casual and sometimes more formal, but always honest. She seeks to create true homes for people, places they are going to love for a long time. "It's not as much about the style or design as it is about the soul of the place," she said.

Last year Cindy collaborated with a friend on one of her favorite projects to date. Their client owns the largest collection of original American art in the nation. She said it was absolutely mind boggling to be handling irreplaceable works of art, pieces that you have seen in prints all of your life never dreamed you would ever see the original. In the owner's museum were works of John Singer Sargent, Winslow Homer, Edward Hicks and Thomas Cole. "There was a room full of William Walkers," she said.

They first took a complete inventory of the art in photographs. "Then we started dreaming," she said. They chose two favorites for the living room and drew inspiration for the rest of the room's décor from them. Because it had gorgeous views of the outdoors, they chose a neutral palette that allowed the physical location to play off of the art beautifully. And in the end, all were delighted.

One buzzword in the design industry right now is "branding," but that's just not what she's all about. "I've tried to avoid having a look so distinct that is says 'Cindy,'" she said. In a place where 'cookie cutter' homes

abound, she wants to do completely away with the mold. "We seem to be in a world of ever-increasing homogenization and standardization," she said. "People have grown to accept a world that is lacking in charm, character and spiritual meaning. I feel this need to champion a return to the life well-lived."

BILL BARGAINER



CHARLOTTE GASTON



CINDY BARGAINER

