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South Florida's design stars: Three make prestigious AD 100

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LIZ ORDONEZ / LIZ ORDONEZ

Charles Allem designed the bedroom in his South Beach condo as a retreat.

Charles Allem creates over-the-top design with quartz on walls and sheared mink on chairs.

John Barman designed an apartment near Lincoln Center for Wynton Marsalis after being inspired by his jazz.

And Scott Snyder's trademark is timeless design whether he works in Antigua, London or Palm Beach.

This trio of South Florida designers has different styles, but one thing in common: They're all on the latest "AD 100."

Architectural Digest's prestigious list of top designers and architects that come from as far away as Africa and the Middle East. Others on the list include design superstars Geoffrey Bradfield, Mario Buatta, David Easton, Mariette Himes Gomez, Alexa Hampton and Peter Marino.

CHARLES ALLEM CAD International, Miami

The recession doesn't appear to have hit Allem's high-end, international clientele. Allem, who grew up in Johannesburg says he creates in a variety of styles from Art Deco to Louis XIV, but the results are all comfortable and luxurious. That luxury includes walls lacquered or covered in rock crystal or quartz and sheared mink on chairs.

But his personal style is calm and minimal. He relies on a lot of white and sculptural forms in his South Beach condo. His office is also sleek and minimalistic.

"I like blank space to think in and create," says Allem, who is on the list for the fourth time. "Personally, I like very calm, understated and restrained luxury."

His inspiration: He is inspired by nature, art, period architecture -- or some unexpected element such as caviar at a cocktail party, which he translated into dozens of metal spheres in different sizes on the ceiling of the Mira Hotel in Hong Kong.

Direction of design: "Design has been brought to the masses," he says. "There is no

excuse for anyone not having a nice home. All levels of stores are doing amazing stuff. You can find good design at places like Williams Sonoma and Crate & Barrel."

What you should splurge on: A quality area rug sets the tone for what else is to be done. Fabulous throws, pillows, new lamps can change the landscape. They are the finishing touches.

Best advice: "If something doesn't work, give it to someone or sell it," he says. "Have one good set of dishes and use them every day. We need to streamline our lives and live a better life."

JOHN BARMAN Miami Beach and New York

Designers often say that their inspiration comes from everywhere, especially from clients. But when the client is a creative person, the style may not be so easy to interpret, such as when jazz musician Wynton Marsalis played the piano in his living room as inspiration for Barman.

"It was very difficult," says Barman, who is on the list for the third time. "I'm a decorator, not a musician. The things he played were very happy and up and lively. I tried to incorporate that feeling into his interior."

"It's a little bit jazzy, comfortable, a little bit fun but not too unexpected. The colors are bright yellows, reds and bright blues. And because jazz has New Orleans inspiration, some of the patterns were New Orleans inspired."

His style: He likes to inject what he calls "contemporary glamour" -- something colorful and something exciting with classical overtones. It might be mixing antiques with modern furniture or injecting color into white space.

His inspiration: The ideas may come directly from the clients, travel or the architecture of the space.

Direction of design: "Recently design has been very neutral and very safe, not crazy color. People have used color throughout history, and it's coming back. We are using very contemporary mixed with classic. The new modern art furniture is very beautiful and mixing that with comfortable furniture is very new. We are getting away from mid-century modern."

What you should splurge on: One great piece of modern or antique furniture such as a great chair, as long as it's exciting and a focal point.

What is hot in South Florida now: New contemporary furniture like that shown at Design Miami at Art Basel Miami Beach -- modern furniture designed by artists.

SCOTT SNYDER Palm Beach and New York

Snyder is not the designer clients hire to get the latest "look." He doesn't do trendy. His philosophy during the past 25 years has been the same: Timeless design that doesn't need to look dated.

"I do not practice what you could call disposable design that could almost be considered fashion," says Snyder, who is on the list for the fourth time. "We are more apt to buy clothing that's disposable.

"This is important especially in times when some people are feeling a definite change in their economic circumstance -- whether it is psychological or due to taking a real financial hit."

His inspiration: He listens to the client and finds where their passion lies. They may love the Venetian plaster walls they saw in Venice or the exquisite marble work they noticed in Istanbul or tapestry in Marrakech.

His wallpaper and fabric line: He started development on his Harbour Island Collection based on his travel to the Bahamas. The collection, prints and solids using the colors of native flowers, is being considered by Cowton & Tout.

Direction of design: It is moving in a more contemporary direction. The children of his clients want to live a cleaner lifestyle without the clutter of the family's collections.

"If a 21-year-old is entertaining other 20-year-olds and she is living with a pair of English Regency chairs handed down, she will feel out of place if her girlfriends are living with Lucite chairs," he says.

What you should splurge on: If you have a sofa from Pottery Barn, you can splurge on a pair of good chairs that validate it. They can make the Pottery Barn piece look custom. Another good investment is art.

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