

San Francisco Chronicle

Tailored Meets Timeless

Anh-Minh Le, Special to The Chronicle

Sunday, July 5, 2009

An economic downturn has a way of bringing out the entrepreneurial side of some people, such as interior designer Heather Hilliard (www.heatherhilliard.com). Although she knew she would someday launch her own practice, the recession - which led to a slowdown at the firm where she worked - proved to be the impetus.

Soon after striking out on her own, Hilliard was selected to participate in the prestigious San Francisco Decorator Showcase, which was held in the spring. She designed the penthouse, successfully creating a relaxed yet chic space set against stunning panoramic views.

"I'm one of the few people you'll meet who can say she's found a way to make her life's greatest passion into a career," she said.

An art history major, Hilliard worked at the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. She later completed her master's degree in interior architecture and design at the Academy of Art University. She went on to work with several renowned designers.

While Hilliard described her spaces as "tailored and timeless," she added that she's "more interested in narrowing in on a client's taste and lifestyle to help create a personalized, individual interior rather than very style-driven design. ... In the end, I help the client to achieve a design that reflects them so they feel comfortable in their home."

A Few Favorites

Brahms Mount Textiles: "I love the cotton blankets, throws and linen towels made in Maine by Brahms Mount Textiles. They are woven from proprietary yarns on Crompton and Knowles W3 shuttle looms. The looms produce selvages that cannot unravel or be aesthetically obtained by modern equipment. They hand fold the edges on all sides and securely sew them in place." (www.brahmsmount.com)

Fortuny fabric: "Mariano Fortuny began producing his exquisite textiles in the early 1900s at his factory on the island of Giudecca near Venice, Italy. He developed his own formulas for dyes and pigments based on the ancient techniques of the masters, which gave his textiles the feeling of antiquity. His same secret process and machines are used today to ensure the highest-quality textiles. Each piece varies slightly in color, making every one a unique piece of art." (www.fortuny.com)



Poco Dolce bittersweet chocolate tiles: "Two-inch squares, sprinkled with gray sea salt that brings out flavor accents in the chocolate without making it salty. My favorite is the almond sea salt and the almond coconut sea salt. I am literally addicted to these chocolate squares, made locally on Third Street in San Francisco by Poco Dolce. When I need my fix, I head over to Bittersweet Chocolate Café on Fillmore Street." (www.pocodolce.com)

The Hilliard Cheat Sheet

Avoiding pitfalls: "I find that most people do not know how to hang and present art in their own homes. I cringe when I walk into a lovely home but find art that is not the right proportion for the space or find it hanging way too high. Homeowners should not hang one small framed piece on a large wall. If you want to hang small works, it is best to group them grid-like and hang them approximately one inch apart. Most important, hang the center of a large work or grouping at least 5 feet, 6 inches high, which is approximate eye level."

Design comeback: "Lately, I'm seeing a lot of grass-cloth wall coverings. I don't think it ever went out of style, but it was especially popular in the '60s and '70s. There are endless new possibilities in terms of colors and patterns. It's a great way to add a layer of texture to a room."

Good buys: "SFMOMA's Annual Artists Warehouse Sale at Fort Mason. The five-day sale features paintings, photographs, sculptures, prints and works on paper at 50 percent off regular retail price." (sfmoma.org)

Little luxuries: "I love Diptyque candles. They are expensive, but they last for hours. All of the Diptyque fragrances are natural, whether they are woody, spicy, green, floral or fruity; they have never used synthetic fragrances to produce their products. My favorite is Figuier (fig tree), but I also love Feu de Bois (firewood)." (diptyqueparis.com)

Recommended reading: "'Axel Vervoordt: Timeless Interiors' by Armelle Baron and Christian Sarramon. Vervoordt is a Belgian antique dealer and designer. I'm always referencing the American Institute of Architects' 'Architectural Graphic Standards' and S.C. Reznikoff's 'Interior Graphic and Design Standards.' "

*This article appeared on page L - 3 of the San Francisco Chronicle
Sunday, July 5, 2009*