

TRADITION with a Twist

Tennessee decorator Eric Ross has mastered the art of putting a fresh spin on time-honored style.

BY Lisa Frederick | PHOTOGRAPHY BY John O'Hagan





PHOTOGRAPH BY EVIN KREHBIEL

Most design professionals will tell you that their interest in the field started early, but it's rare that they landed their first client in childhood. Eric Ross, founder of Eric Ross Interiors in Nashville, was just 14 when his married sister enlisted him for an initial "buff and fluff," a series of small updates to freshen the look of her home. "I'd go in and change out accessories or bring in pillows and new artwork," says Eric, a native of Paducah, Kentucky. "It was just something I was good at and enjoyed."

Fast-forward to February 2009. Having trained with a local decorator after college, followed by a short stint in furniture retail and seven-plus years at a large design firm, Eric decided the time was right to strike out on his own. Since then, he has built a reputation for crafting lushly layered rooms that honor the tenets of traditional style while reflecting the soul of their occupants. "Your home should reflect who you are on your best day," Eric says. "When you go to a great party or a big event, you want to put your best foot forward, so you wear a great outfit and you get your hair done. That's really what your home should look like."



For Eric, it's the smallest touches—the jewelry, if you like—that help to elevate a space to its full splendor. "The longer I work, the more enamored I get with details," Eric says. "There's a discovery that's involved in a room every time [you see it]—things that are very subtle, but they tell the story. And that's where the authenticity comes into a room, where the friends of the homeowner really feel comfortable because it's a true representation of their friend's personality."

Eric's associate, Christine Barker, is a key part of pulling all those details together, from culling fabric options to helping draft floor plans. "She's a good sounding board, and she brings a younger eye," he says. Like Eric, Christine loves the South, and she shares his appreciation for the warmth and comfort that define the region's homes. "Southern style kind of has a softness to it, but lots of color and lots of pattern and texture," she says.

Those elements, along with a deeply



rooted regard for heritage, are at the center of what has made Eric's work such a success. "To me, it goes back to storytelling, and it feels old and grounded," he explains. "That's why I love traditional style. It gives me a sense of history and of permanence."

For more information, visit ericrossinteriors.com.

FROM THEIR HOMES TO YOURS

Eric and Christine share their best tips for making your interiors sing.

- Decorate one room at a time. "Most people will have a list of 10 items in 10 different rooms: a chair in the guestroom, a new lamp in the living room," Eric says. "If you select these items in a vacuum, you've spent all this money and you don't have anything completed. It becomes demotivating, and it becomes overwhelming. Finish one room so that you have a sense of accomplishment and you see something finished. It may take two years, but you'll actually get it done."
- Stay away from trendy décor. "Trends date a room really quickly," Eric says. It's okay to bring them in through small accents, but make sure these pieces are easy to change. "I always tell people that it's not just the financial commitment you're making to these rooms, it's the emotional investment of selecting every item," he says. Adds Christine, "It's important to figure out what you really like, as opposed to whether you like something because you're seeing it everywhere. Pay attention over a longer period of time what you're reacting to in magazines and when you're out and about shopping—what gets an emotional response."
- Don't put off decorating projects. "Make design a priority," Eric says. "It's a very nurturing gift to yourself, because if you think about how much time you spend in your home, the positive energy it gives you is tremendous. So many clients have never had a room professionally decorated, and they tell me over and over again how it changes their lives. I can't overstate it: Don't wait."