



Brockschmidt & Coleman

NEW YORK DESIGNERS BILL BROCKSCHMIDT AND COURTNEY COLEMAN TALK THEIR SHARED LOVE OF HISTORY, HOW THEY KEEP TRADITIONAL ROOMS FRESH, AND THEIR RECENT OPENING OF A SECOND STUDIO IN NEW ORLEANS. TEXT KAREN CARROLL

Southern Home (SH): You both formally studied architecture, but was there an earlier moment that foreshadowed your pivot to interior decoration?

Courtney Coleman (CC): My great-aunt was a decorator in the Mississippi Delta. When I was a teenager, she'd take me with her to markets in New York and Dallas. Working the shows with her and spending time in rooms she designed was so educational.

Bill Brockschmidt (BB): My family moved to Virginia at the age when I was becoming aware of my environment, and we would take trips to Williamsburg and the James River plantations and see the houses open during Virginia Garden Week. For me, historic architecture and gracious interiors were all one and the same. Then I went to the University of Virginia and fell in love with the idea of Jeffersonian Classicism. I went to graduate school in the Midwest in the era of post-modernism and deconstruction, and it wasn't

exactly what I thought being an architect was all about in my childhood. I ended up attending the Institute of Classical Architecture & Art's summer program in New York before working for Eric J. Smith Architects, who collaborated closely with David Anthony Easton, where Courtney was working at the time. Finally, the interiors and architecture were truly coming together in a way that made sense to me. The two really are inseparable, as is the landscape...
CC: ...which we don't design, but definitely have strong opinions about.

SH: How are your styles similar, and where do they differ?

BB: We both love color and the charming and quirky versions of classical architecture, working within the style of the house but tempering that classical vocabulary with unusual things that might be witty, charming, or dramatic. But always the most important thing is that the personality of the owner shines through.

CC: I'm not sure how to answer that question! We never present anything that we both don't agree on. Sometimes that conversation is a labored one, but it always results in something that is different and better than we could have imagined on our own.

SH: Do your Southern roots impact your work more through style or process?

CC: It's definitely both. I think we bring a Southern kind of mannerliness to the table. In terms of aesthetics, the Southern tradition of appreciating inherited furniture no matter what gives way to an eclecticism those pieces bring. If clients want to use their grandmother's secretary, we find a place where it looks great and contributes to the design scheme, rather than become a dowdy afterthought. Another thing is we love to entertain, so we try to think about creating those spaces beyond just the dining room. And of course, we can design lots of cabinets for all the dishes.



SH: Your love of color is a refreshing counterpoint to the sea of beige and grey we see so much of these days.

BB: We're fine with a neutral room, but it needs pops of color here and there. It seems like there are two polar opposites going on in design right now. There's the beige, hotel-like blandness that's safe. And then there's a very rich and layered bohemian, undesigned look. We're not that either, because it's hard to replicate—those houses usually come from amazing personalities who travel and collect eclectic things. Our work is edited. We like to have bright colors, beautiful antiques, and dynamic furniture plans, but it's not haphazard—a lot of thought goes into it.



SH: How do you make traditional or classic design feel fresh for the Ikea generation?

CC: I want to jump on that, because I'm not sure the younger generation really is the Ikea generation. I think young people are interested in authenticity and in being ecologically conscious, which in some ways means reusing old furniture, whether it's the stuff they're finding at markets or inheriting from their families. Even though design now is so ubiquitous and accessible to people because of online sources, it's more important than ever to live in transporting spaces that are personal. You definitely see that in all the design blogs and social media.

BB: If a house has beautiful bones—and sometimes it has those initially and other times they have to be created—then the interiors can be adaptable. We love when a client has, four or six years down the road, made some changes, gotten some new things without our advice, and adapted it to their lifestyle. Working in a style that allows that flexibility is something that we work toward. We don't want to be so strict that the room falls apart when a chair gets moved around a bit or the owner adds in things from their travels. A house should be refreshed and layered over time. On the other hand, sometimes we walk into a house and think how can they not see that this table has moved eight inches off-center?

SH: You use a lot of statement-making wallpapers. Do you have a favorite source?

CC: That might be our #1 must—we love a good wallpaper. We work with Adelphi Paper Hangings on a lot of projects. They produce mainly hand-blocked historical document papers, and they'll do custom

colors. A lot of the historic patterns are large scale because they were imported from England, where houses obviously had very tall ceilings, and then when they were brought to the Colonies, they seemed way, way oversized for the smaller rooms of the late 1700s and early 1800s. The colors were also much brighter than we're used to, which was also true of paint and upholstery colors. So that's kind of an interesting element to start with, and it's fun to work with Adelphi because they're history nerds like we are.

SH: Is there a style or period of furniture that always draws your eye?

BB: It's fun to look for unusual interpretations of high-style furniture, so if England and France set the gold standard of furniture design, we're interested in how other regions take that and make it their own, say a Mexican version of Queen Anne or a Portuguese interpretation of Chippendale, or a Sicilian idea of Louis XVI. A lot of antiques that we gravitate toward, rather than being museum-worthy masterpieces, show an individuality and or an elegance that's not expected.

CC: We also like to mix in some modern elements to keep things lively, and one of our role models in that regard is the midcentury decorator Henri Samuel, who would put a modern coffee table and lamp in the middle of an otherwise traditional room.

SH: You've just opened a second design studio and storefront in New Orleans. What prompted the venture?

CC: When I was in architecture school at Mississippi State, we would skip class on Friday afternoons and drive to New Orleans to wander



around and look at everything. That was as much a part of my education as anything else. After graduation I thought that I wanted to move there, but the economy wasn't great, and there were more jobs in New York.

BB: I have a similar story. While I was at UVA, I went for Mardi Gras one year and then returned the next with my whole architectural studio, and then again during spring break to interview for jobs because I had fallen in love with the city. So Courtney and I had this connection to the city before we even met each other. We'd never thought about opening a retail shop in New York, but when my sister-in-law offered us office space on Magazine Street, we jumped at the chance.

SH: Tell us about the boutique. What will you be carrying?

BB: It's called Sud, which means the South, as in New Orleans, and Sicily, in the south of Italy, where my husband and I also have a house. New Orleans has an important Sicilian history, which is obviously not as well-known as the French and Spanish influences, but the French Quarter was once known as Piccolo Palermo. We sell 18th- and 19th-century Sicilian furniture; ceramics from companies that have been in business for over 300 years and some from new, young artists; papier-mâché busts and urns by Mark Gagnon inspired by Italian pottery; and works by artists John Woodward Kelley and Leonard Porter, who both create paintings and drawings in the classical style inspired by the myths of antiquities.

CC: We're looking forward to becoming immersed in the design and cultural community of the city.



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Go-to fabric:

Bill: Hand-blocked prints
Courtney: English chintz, French toile de Jouy, or a humble calico

Always on the hunt for:

Bill: 17th- and 18th-century Sicilian maiolica
Courtney: Indian saris

Favorite color combination:

Bill: Cool green and warm green
Courtney: Same

Inspiring historic house:

Bill: Pitot House in New Orleans
Courtney: Mount Vernon

Period of furniture:

Bill: I admit I adore brown furniture: faded mahogany classics or regional variations, such as Mexican in the Queen Anne style. And I can never say no to a chair.
Courtney: Spending time in New Orleans. I'm currently looking at Victorian furniture anew and how it can work in a contemporary setting.

What/who inspires me:

Bill: David Adler and Frances Elkins
Courtney: Gardens

Trend I avoid:

Bill: Too much precious art furniture
Courtney: Digitally printed fabrics and wallpapers—I'm just not there

Best design advice:

Bill: Break for lunch during a design meeting
Courtney: Dimmers on every light switch

Little luxury I can't live without:

Bill: The Sonic-like ice machine in our office
Courtney: Crisp, low thread count percale sheets and a bottle of French Truck cold brew coffee concentrate