



Designing woman

Passion translates into magazine-ready rooms

Story by LINDA JERKINS
Photo by JENNI GIRTMAN

Owner of Erika Ward Interiors, the Atlanta native is co-founder of Room Service Atlanta, a nonprofit group of interior design professionals that provides pro bono design services to homeless shelters and transitional facilities in the Atlanta area. Ward lives in College Park with her husband, Chris, and four children, but works with clients throughout the Atlanta area, including Vinings, Morningside, Midtown, Druid Hills, Grant Park and Buckhead.

Background: Majored in finance at the University of Georgia. After graduation, I worked in the design-build industry as an accountant managing multimillion-dollar construction budgets before turning my passion for interior design into a successful business. My path was not a straight shot into the design industry, but all of my past experience prepared me for what I consider my dream job.

My decorating style: I consider myself a New Traditionalist. I love designing a room that is ultra livable, mixing furniture from various periods or finding ways to incorporate family heirlooms into modern design. I have a knack for mixing high- and low-ticket items to produce a design that is approachable yet magazine-ready.

Best thing about my job: Design is never boring. Every room comes with a new set of challenges. It is my job to find the right solution for that particular space. As a designer, you cannot employ the same solution over and over again. Every new room deserves a new approach.

My favorite home accessories: Home fragrance candles. Some of my favorites are Votivo, Voluspa and Bond No. 9 New York Chinatown Candle.

My design trick: Mixing at least two pieces of antique furniture into a space. It gives the room a more authentic look that's less like an interpretation of something off a showroom floor.

Best design advice I ever got: New York designer Shelia Bridges told »

Designer Erika Ward strikes a pose at one of her favorite Atlanta furniture stores, Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams.

me it's important to enjoy the decorating process by taking your time instead of rushing to get everything finished quickly. The rooms that look like they have evolved over time are often the best.

Favorite rooms to design: Children's rooms. More parents want their children's spaces to have a sophisticated look. Mature fabrics and nontraditional color combinations are showing up in kids' rooms more than the character-based designs we've seen in the past.

Hardest space to design: My master suite. I am indecisive when it comes to decorating my own home.

Most common mistake people make: Many people choose paint colors before anything else in the room. That is a big no-no. I always start with a fabric or piece of artwork and use it as a jumping off point.

Some favorite Atlanta stores: Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams for furniture selection and customer service; PDI Atlanta; Savvy Snoot; and Steve McKenzie's.

My favorite design websites, designers & books: Websites: houzz.com (I was a two-year contributor) and pinterest.com. Designers: Amanda Nisbet (New York), Lisa Ferguson (Toronto) and Thom Filicia (New York). Books: "Tom Scheerer Decorates," "Chicago Spaces" and "Thom Filicia Style."

What I collect: Publishers often send me design books to review on my blog or for Huffington Post. I've got quite a library. I enjoy reading about each designer's approach and studying their philosophies.

What I would like to design: Boutique hotels.

Household pet peeve: I'm fussy about the cleanliness of the wood and carpet floors in our house. With four children (ranging in age from 9 months to 6-year-old twins), two adults and a boxer, our home is a high-traffic area.

How having four young children influences my home decoration:

Nothing can be too delicate around here. Our furnishings and accessories are saturated color and pattern. We're an energetic bunch, and we're big on comfort. I teach my children how to take care of our possessions and to enjoy, not destroy them.

Favorite household object: A good vacuum. Did I mention how obsessed I am about my floors?



The young professional who owns this Vinings town home sought Ward's help in arranging the furniture in her living room, which features a corner fireplace. Ward saw this arrangement of the furniture on her first visit.



Ward reconfigured the existing sectional and placed it on the opposite side of the room. She also:

- Used a sisal rug to help delineate the space and identify it as a living room.
- Purchased a media console for storage, removed the television from the fireplace and placed it on the console.
- Hung custom linen drapery to soften hard lines on the window.
- Accented the room with wall decor, new throw pillows and accessories.
- Used the client's existing coffee table but added new side tables for additional surface space for guests.
- Added floor lamps for additional lighting.

Photos by ERIKA WARD

Some of favorite Atlanta places:

The concept of Southern hospitality is dear to me, and I reward those establishments that show it. I frequent restaurants such as Urban PL8, Thumbs Up Diner and the Atlanta Grill at Ritz-Carlton. My family also enjoys visits to the city's nature trails, Old Fourth Ward playground and Centennial Park.

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