



One-of-a-Kind Design

Boston-based designer Charles Spada doesn't settle for anything less than unique.

BY CHRISTINE AEBISCHER

If there is one thing Charles Spada cannot stand, it's unoriginal design. He is not interested in regurgitating other people's ideas, and he does not seek inspiration from his surroundings. He believes that interior design is not something that can be learned and that talent should be innate.

"I walk into a room or an empty house or a house that has to be dismantled, and I know instantly after speaking with the client what should be done for them, for their house," shares Spada. "We're a full-service, Old World design company, and in my mind that's what design



The sitting area of Spada's former Boston loft features furniture of his own design, including a banquette covered in heavy-textured linen from the John Saladino Collection and upholstered chairs available at his showroom at the Boston Design Center. Spada also chose 19th-century accents, such as the four large framed drawings depicting youth and old age and a rare American grain barrel carved from a hollowed-out tree trunk, to complete the room.

should be. Anyone can shop and wind up looking like they came from the store; or you can design a home that's not cookie cutter."

Spada's aversion to imitation in lieu of original design is so strong that it has shaped his entire career. While he was always drawn to design, Spada began his career in clothing before transitioning to interior design. He studied French couture in Paris in his 20s, but when he began working in a major fashion house in New York City, he found that the principles he had learned in Paris were no longer applicable. "They copied everything. They were not interested in originality or in what I could

offer," recalls Spada.

Without the freedom to truly create, Spada soon realized this was not the industry for him, but he does not regret the time spent in couture. "I think segueing from clothing design into interior design, I could not have had a better foundation," he states.

With his interior design projects, Spada takes control of the entire process from the initial plans to the last curtain hem (which should be hand-rolled, never ironed, according to Spada). Spada designs all of the furniture, upholstery pieces and lighting for his clients, and also brings in handpicked French antiques to blend with the contemporary design.



A vignette from Spada's former apartment channels Old World design with 18th-century pieces from France, England and Italy, including the French gilded bracket table, English pine stool upholstered in Brunswick & Fils tiger silk velvet and the Italian gilt wall brackets. The artwork comprises a circa-1930 French bisque sculpture, 19th-century French plaster cast of a leg, and framed drawings by French muralist Marcel Lenoir.



For the light-filled living room of a client's high-rise apartment in Boston, Spada chose an aluminum-and-glass coffee table, expandable flame-mahogany pedestal dining table, antique lighting and upholstery, all from the Charles Spada showroom at the Boston Design Center.

"All of my decorating is fresh, is new and is super well edited," says Spada. "If I put five things in a room, I remove two or three. 'Less is more' is my credo."

When Spada takes on a project, it is not merely a business transaction or another photo for his portfolio. Instead, he inserts himself into his clients' lives to deliver distinctive spaces to suit their individual needs, and his design process takes a couple of years, not weeks. Some of his favorite projects resulted not only in beautiful homes, but in lasting friendships as well.

"When I walk into a room or house and I can say this has really been the best that I've been allowed to do, and I've got a happy client and I've come away

with a friend — that warmth and intimacy you begin to share — all of that is really important," shares Spada, for whom wonderful clients make all the difference. If a client is difficult or unresponsive to his ideas, Spada is not afraid to walk away, rather than sacrifice his vision. "I stand by my convictions," says Spada. "It builds more client confidence."

This confidence results in client referrals, which are how Spada began his interior design career and how he maintains it today. The owner of the first home he decorated called him out of the blue after hearing from a mutual friend that he had good taste, and from there it snowballed. "People feel a great deal of confidence in me. I have a wonderful portfolio and website and people react to



In the same Boston high-rise, Spada created this custom columned cabinet for storage in the dining room.



In the library, Spada combined a built-in bookcase, desk and banquet of his own design with antique chairs and a rosewood table.

that. The proof is in the pudding," says Spada.

While Spada is based in Boston, he has worked on homes throughout the country, and he knows how to keep his designs in harmony with each specific area. "There's nothing worse than in Florida, for example, to see something that looks like it should be in Boston," he states. No matter the location, though, Spada believes that every room needs to be inviting and all seating (unless antique) needs to be comfortable, beautifully made and durable. He prefers hardwood floors whenever possible and is a stickler for simple fireplaces of limestone, granite or antique brick.

One thing he despises: open floor plans. "I love rooms, separate spaces," he declares.

"There's nothing worse than in Florida to see something that looks like it should be in Boston."