

The Beautiful Essence of High Style Robin Rains

BY EMME NELSON BAXTER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JERRY ATNIP



“I consider not only the architecture, but also the setting of the home. Every project is an individual labor of love.”

The delightful blond girl from Byrdstown, Tennessee, dubbed “Most Likely to Succeed” by her classmates at Pickett County High School, has lived up to that senior superlative. Robin Rains, now a Nashvillian, is a nationally known interior designer with clients stretching from the Northeastern seaboard down to Florida, venturing west to Texas and filling in handfuls of states between.

She was imbued with design elements as a child. Her father, a contractor, could often be found poring over house plans splayed open on the dining table. While Dad built the homes, her mother assisted with the residences’ finishes and décor. Rains soaked up the geometries and color palettes. By the time she was 10, she was focusing her 4-H Club speeches to her fellow fifth graders on interior design. “I never thought of myself as doing anything else,” she muses.



The family moved several times to take advantage of certain housing markets, affording young Robin the experience of living in five or six different areas of the Southeast before returning to their beloved Byrdstown near Dale Hollow Lake. Surely it was this peripatetic childhood that fostered in Rains an ability to connect quickly with new people, to empathize with them, and to communicate two ways gracefully.

From Pickett County High, Rains enrolled at Tennessee Technological University and graduated with a degree in interior





design. She moved to Longview, Texas, as a newlywed and was hired by Trend Furniture and Interiors, a high-end furniture business owned by an architect/designer. While her mentor there taught her more about scale and proportion of furniture, the greatest takeaway from the job was exposure to clients.

There's a lot of mind reading and interpretation with design. It's detective work and psychology.

Rains gleans information as she interviews each of her clients. Typically hired for upscale residential projects, she homes in not only on the homeowners' words during this process, but also on



dislikes. "Learning from people and being a peacemaker comes only from a lot of experience," she says.

Rains, then solo, moved to Nashville in 1988 and began working for Bradford's Interiors shortly thereafter. "There, I learned how important customer service is," she said. Using the excellent resources of the organization, she built up a strong client base that included healthcare, entertainment, and sports industry officials. Some of those clients have since moved to other parts of the country; they and many others have gone on to build second homes at the beach or countryside and continue to call upon Rains for her talent. Now she goes to them—wherever they may be.

Removing stress from her clients' lives is her most important task in every project, she says. "Having a client tell me, 'It looks great' is what I expect," Rains observes. "Having a client tell me, 'It looks great, and the entire process was smooth and effortless' is what I strive for."

their actions. She wants to determine how they really live. What space do they gravitate toward? What is their lifestyle? Do they lie down on their furniture? Are they perfectionists? Then she can distill, discern, and design with understanding.

More often than not, couples, she notes, have different viewpoints. One is generally focused on budget issues and the other on likes and



Her jobs come in all shapes and sizes. One client who had purchased an erstwhile Boy Scout ranch hired her to work on all the accompanying buildings on the property. Other jobs might be smaller, such as determining how to integrate a kitchen and family room in a friend's home.

Someone once asked me if I only work on billionaires' houses. I laughed so hard, I almost fainted! I'm just a good ole country girl at heart.

When you meet Rains, there's not much evidence of a rural past. On a given day, she might be called a dead ringer for actress Kyra Sedgwick. She dresses with polished ease in neutral tones, frequently breaks out into a lovely bright smile, and sports edgy dark-rimmed glasses when she needs a little visual boost. Her voice is calm and her words thoughtfully considered. She also wears the rare, approachable confidence of someone as comfortable directing a cadre of subcontractors as she is having chai with a client in their Manhattan aerie.

Rains opened her eponymous boutique firm about ten years ago. Her first day in business was September 10, 2001. Her second day was spent with her assistant and bookkeeper, glued to the television, expecting the world to end, worrying over the lives of millions of New Yorkers—including a couple of clients. In the space of one decade, Rains' work has appeared in two design books—*Visions of Design* and *Spectacular Homes of Tennessee*—plus numerous magazines including *Southern Accents*.

Her passion is buying. "The inspiration-and-buying journey is one big adrenalin rush," she intones. Armed with a courier, Rains digs through fairs, shops, sheds, warehouses, and flea markets all over the European countryside. The most delicious feast for the eyes is the Paris Flea Market. "Learning French is definitely on my bucket list," she adds.



"I adore unusual, edgy, one-of-a-kind pieces," Rains says. "And when we can't seem to find what we are looking for, we often have it made. Clients like and appreciate having a uniquely designed piece that is not mass produced."

She finds inspiration everywhere—from magazines and books to architecture and nature. And Rains likes to remind her clientele that spaces don't have to stay one way forever. They can evolve and change by simply moving good, classic pieces from room to room.

With today's frenzied lifestyles, it is a blessing to be able to retreat to a home, she maintains. One's dwelling should be a peaceful refuge, a place of contentment, beauty, solace, and rest.

"What we feel on the inside can, and often does, find an outward display in our surroundings," she says. "The outward expression is often the joy that we feel and want to share; thus our homes are silent witnesses to what is important to us and what people sense when they are in them." 🏡

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