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CURATORIAL VISION

Drawn to storied heirlooms, tactile textures and timeless craftsmanship, Santa Fe, New Mexico, designer Chandler Prewitt creates convivial spaces that embrace his clients' interests and collections

WRITTEN BY Eliza Cross

For as long as he can remember, designer Chandler Prewitt has been entranced by the magic of New Mexico. "From a young age, I spent summers with my grandparents at their ranch outside of Santa Fe," he says. "They lived in a log cabin up on top of a hill with a huge deck on the front. Cow Creek runs through the property, and we used to go fishing for hours. They had three horses we could ride, and they cooked our meals on a wood-burning stove."

Memories of the enchanted state stayed with Prewitt while he pursued a humanities degree with an emphasis in art history from New College in California. After graduation,



Opposite page, from top: Kachina dolls hang above the entrance of Roger Foltz and Ken Bales' Santa Fe home. A built-in niche holds a pair of authentic women's moccasins, and two beaded saddlebags are displayed on the gently curved wall. | Two parfleches made for carrying arrows flank the grand piano. Hopi kachina dolls are displayed on stands of recycled teak wood; some of them have had feathers added. The painting is by Frank Croft, and the chairs are from Pearson Furniture. **This page:** A ceremonial beaded pipe holder is displayed with a pair of moccasins atop a chest from Four Hands. Photos: Amadeus Leitner





From top: A custom, marble-topped table base is made from solid cast iron in the shape of a bull. | The chaise was crafted from antique wood carvings from India, and the throw is a Moroccan wedding shawl; the light is also from Morocco. The corner settee is upholstered in Jim Thompson fabric. Photos: Bill Stengel.

WA & A wants to know...

Designer Chandler Prewitt shares tips for entertaining, his favorite travel destination and some of the artists who currently inspire him.



Q: Your rooms often feature one-of-a-kind, storied

objects. What's one of your own prized possessions? **A:** I was fortunate to inherit an antique mahogany writing desk with turned legs that's been in my family for five generations.

Q: Who are some of your favorite artists right now? **A:** I recently got to meet Santa Fe painter Billy Schenck, and Timothy Cummings is a good friend; I've been a big fan of his since I was very young. Luke Butler in the Bay Area does amazing work, and Kevin Box is a local sculptor who creates incredible origami sculptures from bronze. I also like San Francisco artist Kirk Maxson's organic works in metal.

Q: Do you have a favorite interior wall paint color? **A:** Navajo White by Benjamin Moore is a warm white that's a good starting point for building a color story.

Q: Where do you like to travel? **A:** We often go to Taos, which has a richness and a serene quality that feels low key if you want to relax. There's so much to do if you want to be more active; you can explore the hiking trails, visit local artists, go to the pottery studios, tour the Pueblo and eat at great restaurants.

Q: Describe your personal entertaining style. **A:** I'm a big fan of relaxed dining, so we like to have small dinner parties. I enjoy the intimacy of having a good conversation. I love to cook, so I'll often prepare hearty, homemade dishes that feel good to eat. I might make classic spaghetti and meatballs and create ambiance with checkered tablecloths, red wine and Italian music. The most important thing is that I want people to feel comfortable.

Q: Complete this sentence: If money were no object ...

A: I'd buy a ranch in the mountains of New Mexico and raise chickens.

he worked for a time in San Francisco, designing window displays for companies such as Brooks Brothers and Saks Fifth Avenue. Soon after, he was hired as an interior stylist for renowned designer Ken Fulk.

“My time working with Ken consumed two years of my life, and I learned so much from him — how he manages his business, the close relationships he enjoys with his clients, and his strong work ethic,” Prewitt says, noting that he took this experience with him when he went on to work as a senior designer for the Bay Area firm Geremia Design.

Despite the success in California, Prewitt longed to return to his New Mexico roots. In 2013, he moved to Santa Fe and opened Chandler Prewitt Design that spring. “The timing was right and everything clicked,” he says, noting that his business began to grow, largely from referrals. “Santa Fe had experienced a big building boom in the late ’70s and early ’80s, and so many of the homes built in that era were ready to be updated.”

Whether his clients want to refresh an aging space or build from scratch, Prewitt’s process always begins with extensive conversations. “The process still fascinates me. I form a partnership with my clients, and it’s amazing how a design can unfold; it’s collaborative magic,” he says. “I always try to achieve

a certain amount of elegance, whether their tastes lean toward rustic, contemporary or traditional design. I like to create environments that feel collected over time, and I want my projects to feel lived in and personal. The most important thing is that it feels like home.”

To that end, Prewitt prefers to avoid trends and incorporates heirlooms and items that hold personal meaning for his clients. His designs often feature one-of-a-kind curios, artworks and handcrafted furnishings. “I love items where you can see the hands of the craftsman — wrought iron, beautiful wood carvings and hand-painted furniture,” the designer says. “I look for quality, artistry and unique and interesting materials. I want the items we choose to stay in my clients’ families for generations.”

When clients Roger Foltz and Ken Bales retired and moved to Santa Fe, they hired Prewitt to update the home they’d owned for six years. “We have an extensive Southwestern art and artifact collection, and we were in a quandary about how to incorporate the pieces in our home here,” says Foltz. “Chandler devised creative, innovative ways of using our paintings and historic Native American pottery and other artifacts throughout the spaces.”





Foltz and Bales are both classically trained pianists, so Prewitt gave their Steinway grand piano center stage in the living room and included comfortable seating so they could host intimate performances for friends. A *kiva* fireplace warms the space, and the art collection — which the couple has amassed over 30 years — is displayed on walls, built-in niches and shelves. “We have an art and antique business on the side, and sometimes we bring our customers to our living room and show them how they can live with the artifacts,” Foltz says. “The space is warm and livable, and we enjoy the pieces in our collection every day.”

Prewitt’s firm designs the occasional commercial project in addition to local residential work and homes in Aspen, Colorado, and Scottsdale, Arizona. A two-story building in downtown Santa Fe houses the company’s showroom, office and library on the main floor, while Prewitt’s residence is located upstairs. “It’s a very pleasant functional work and living space,” he says.

October 2016 marks the designer’s third year participating in ShowHouse Santa Fe, which brings together about 30 Northern New Mexico designers to transform a local home. The event opens with a gala on October 7, and home tours take place on the following two weekends with local schools benefiting from the proceeds. This year, Prewitt is tasked with the formidable challenge of renovating the historic home’s kitchen. “People who aren’t familiar with my remodeling work will get a sense of my vision,” he says. “My kitchen renovations are not ultra sleek and sterile, because I think the kitchen should be as warm, inviting and as interesting as the other parts of the home.”

For Prewitt, tackling the extensive project is just another way to give back to the region he’s always loved. ■



For ShowHouse Santa Fe’s 2015 event, Prewitt designed the drawing room. His modern interpretation was to create a comfortable and artistic space; the large painting is by artist Timothy Cummings. Photos: Stephen Lang

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