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## MODERN MIXMASTER

Alice Lane's founder, interior designer Jessica Bennett, built a unique brand, artfully combining classic and contemporary styles

WRITTEN BY Eliza Cross



**Clockwise from left:** In a casual breakfast area, Bennett surrounded a simple, honey-stained Remy table by Dovetail with a quartet of reproduction antique chairs covered in a bold striped fabric. The furnishings and print are from Wonderland. | Attention to detail is the hallmark of exceptional interior design. Here those details include a magnifying glass, select books and a crystal bowl. | An oversized jack and hand-carved mango wood vases contrast with pastel-hued prints by Tobi Fairley. Accessories from Alice Lane. Photos: Lindsay Salazar

If someone calls the headquarters of Alice Lane and asks to speak to Alice, founder Jessica Bennett can be pretty certain that the caller isn't a close friend. Bennett named her Salt Lake City-based design and home furnishings company not after herself but after a quiet street in the foothills of Farmington, Utah. It's where she and her family built their first dream home, and it's also the place where her passion for interior design first began.





**Clockwise from top left:** Bennett specified grasscloth wallpaper for a gentleman's office. The Cortes desk is covered in goatskin parchment, and the indigo star map and vintage postage stamp prints are from *Natural Curiosities*. An alabaster lamp and Visual Comfort overhead light fixture illuminate the space. | *Objects d'art* include a natural piece of rock crystal and a tea light crafted from a slice of polished agate. | Sconces attached directly to the bookcase feature shades wrapped in black leather, and the artwork is from the homeowner's collection. | The Aaron chair has a walnut frame and ivory leather seat, and the David Easton rug is hand-knotted wool and silk. The early American map is a reproduction, and the Hector lamp is solid limestone with a linen shade. The painting is from the homeowner's collection. Furnishings and accessories from Alice Lane. Photos: Nicole Hill Gerulat



Blending classic furnishings with clean-lined, contemporary pieces and unique accessories helps make a space feel fresh.

Bennett originally studied advertising design at Utah State University before working as an art director for a local ad agency. “I developed company logos, billboards, brochures, that kind of thing,” Bennett says. “I loved the process, the people and the challenge of creating designs that really represented our clients’ brands.”

When she and her husband built a new home on a little street called Alice Lane, Bennett got her first taste of full-scale interior design. “Creating our new home from the ground up was very exciting for me,” she says. “I discovered that I loved the three-dimensional aspects and how tangible the process felt compared to the flat, static computer work I was doing. As I worked with different textures, colors and scale, I felt like the design skills I had learned in college really came alive.”



**Clockwise from bottom:** Bennett kept the palette neutral and natural for the living room she designed for the St. George Area Parade of Homes, choosing natural accents like baskets, coral pieces, stones and a carved wooden bowl. A horse print hangs above the fireplace, which was clad with mosaic marble tile. | Swivel stools have an industrial feel with natural wood seats and metal backs. | A bowl filled with carved stone hearts tops a mirrored table. | Yellow geraniums brighten the sunny dining area, where Bennett chose slipcovers with corset detailing for some of the upholstered chairs. Furnishings and accessories from Alice Lane. Photos: Nicole Hill Gerulat

A family friend who owned a software business admired Bennett's style and asked if she'd design the interiors for the company's headquarters. "It was my first commercial project, and I jumped into the deep end," Bennett says. "I bought every book and magazine I could get my hands on and taught myself as I went along. They say if you immerse yourself in the work, eventually after 10,000 hours you'll be an expert. I was really hungry to learn, and it was thrilling work. When that project was completed, the company hired me to design interiors for a number of other buildings."

In 2008, she and her husband opened the first Alice Lane Home Collection store in Orem, Utah. "When we started the business, Tuscan style was popular and stores were showing very heavy fabrics and dark colors," Bennett says. "We showed up to this market with a look that was very different. Traditional furnishings have staying power, but a whole space done in one style can be boring. Blending classic furnishings with clean-lined, contemporary pieces and unique accessories helps make a space feel fresh. We might hang a beautiful piece of modern art over an antique chest, for example. That mash-up makes for a much more interesting space and brings balance to a room."

Customers loved the store's vignettes and began asking for help in their own homes, which led to the development of the company's interior design services.

"My advertising branding background is very helpful when it comes to asking the right questions to really get to know our customers' preferences," Bennett says. "We explore things like their favorite furniture styles, the colors they like, how they like to dress and what magazines they read. Some of our clients are very sophisticated and others are more casual, but great design is for everyone. We love helping people who haven't yet developed their own sense of style create a comfortable place where they can feel at home and take pride in where they live."

The company does both residential and commercial design work, from single rooms to large-scale planning for new construction. "Sometimes clients ask us to choose the design dream team, which is a total thrill," Bennett says. "They'll say, 'We love your work and we want you to choose the right architect, builder and landscape architect for our project.' We know the people with the best practices, the people who can dream with us, and most importantly, the people who will say, 'Yes.'"

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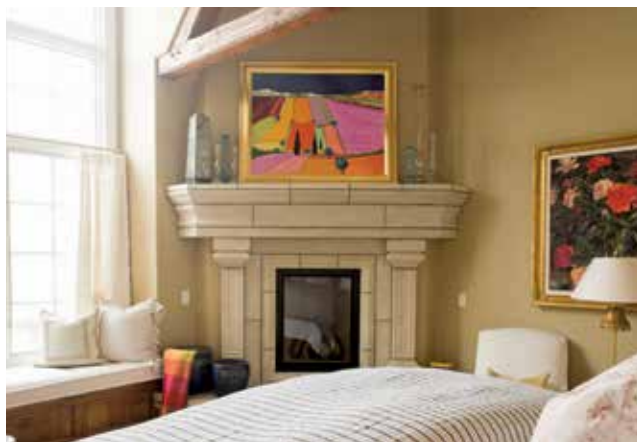
## WA & A wants to know...

Photo: Brittany Griffiths



Designer and entrepreneur Jessica Bennett shares some of her favorite designers, style tips and travel destinations.

**Q:** Who are some of your style icons? **A:** I've always loved and admired the work of Thomas O'Brien. He has a very traveled, collected look. Right now, I'm also crushing hard on Kelly Wearstler; I admire her gusto. Her work is big, bold and unapologetic. **Q:** Do you have a favorite interior wall color right now? **A:** We used Revere Pewter by Benjamin Moore in the Salt Lake City store, which is a really nice warm, neutral gray. I'm also going through a plum phase right now. I like a smoky tone that's sophisticated but not too feminine. You might be surprised, but men tend to love purples. **Q:** Describe one of your favorite possessions. **A:** For the longest time, I admired a lovely secretary designed by Thomas O'Brien for Hickory Chair. The exterior is painted winter white, and the interior is finished in beautiful walnut. I kept a photo of it on my bulletin board for many months, and I finally splurged and bought the piece. Now, I see it whenever I walk into my living room, and it always brings me joy. **Q:** When you want to unwind, where do you like to travel? **A:** In the summertime, we love staying at the Lake Erie cottage that's been in my husband's family for generations. We get around on bikes or golf carts, and it's so nice to slow down and enjoy simple pleasures like sitting on the porch swing. Another one of our favorite getaways is the High Point Market [a home furnishings trade show]. We're technically working, but it's so inspiring to see all the new products; it's a feast for the senses. The event is in April or October when the weather in North Carolina is usually gorgeous, and it's like a reunion because you get to see all your favorite industry people.



**From top:** A cast limestone fireplace was built in to the corner of a compact bedroom, creating space for an inviting window seat. Bennett added mirrored obelisks to the mantel to add visual balance to the homeowner's artwork. | Navy blue walls make a home office feel snug and cozy. The wingback chair features contrasting upholstery, and the crimson and navy rug is hand-knotted wool. Lamps are from Visual Comfort and Thomas O'Brien; furnishings and accessories are from Alice Lane. Photos: Weston Colton

The company opened a new design studio and flagship showroom in downtown Salt Lake City in 2014. An anchor store at the Trolley Square mall, the 10,000-square-foot space was formerly a Restoration Hardware building. "It's architecturally beautiful, with navy blue awnings that offset the red brick exterior," Bennett says. "We have dusty mauve plaster walls in the store and two big, exquisite chandeliers overhead. It's the perfect retail environment for us."

The original store in Orem was rebranded as Wonderland and offers more affordable furnishings. "It's a look I call Utah County, with stylish, high-quality pieces that are also a good value," Bennett says.

Now that the firm has 60 employees, Bennett's role has shifted to managing the company while staff designers handle the bulk of the hands-on work. She still designs the occasional project, though, including the new home she and her husband built two years ago, after they moved from the house on Alice Lane. "Our new home is on the smaller side because we were ready for a more intimate space," she says. "That's one of the things I love about interior design; it's a fluid process, and it's never the same story twice." ■

**Eliza Cross** is a senior contributing editor for *Western Art & Architecture* and the author of a dozen books, including the award-winning *Family Home of the New West* (Cooper Square Publishing), [elizacross.com](http://elizacross.com).