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One of Joel's business ventures is a partnership in the Second Avenue boutique bar Paper Doll. The cool vibe had its genesis in Joel's varied travel itineraries. "Wherever I went, I always checked out the local cocktail scene with an eye towards opening a place that would be unique to Birmingham with a fresh, quirky attitude," says Joel.

SPICE MIX

Taking a page from client and friend Joel Cheatwood's passion for travel, as well as his desire for a nuanced look, interior designer Danielle Balanis employs a brilliant mix of high and low to deliver eclectic, richly-hued rooms with an international attitude.

If great minds think alike,

and those minds also happen to be close friends, then something magical is sure to ensue. That was certainly the case in the Crestwood home of Joel Cheatwood. Joel met interior designer Danielle Balanis after her move to Birmingham in 2007 when they were members of the same supper club. The friendship went beyond the occasional meal, so when Joel was ready to leave his downtown loft for a fresh start, he didn't hesitate to call Danielle. "I wanted to make big changes from all white and concrete floors to color, layers, and vintage pieces—a more sophisticated look," he says.

"When Joel told me the direction he wanted to go, I could instantly envision the mood and mix—combining different periods and references," says Danielle. "He is well-traveled, so we wanted to bring a worldly vibe to his home. We worked with a budget that did not outdo the neighborhood, carefully balancing splurging and saving."

design inspiration

Danielle often advises her clients to keep a file of things that move them—not just from shelter magazines or Pinterest but anywhere. For every project, the designer starts with a "mental mood board," as she calls it. "It usually has nothing to do with interiors per se, but rather it's about an attitude," says Danielle. "Cultural reference points are a catalyst for my designs."

For this project, the designer was inspired by images of David Bowie in Paris in the 1970s that reminded her of Joel. She also took cues from Gucci's 2020 ad campaign; a photo from Studio 54 of Halston, Liza Minnelli, and Betty Ford; and the Tom Ford-directed movie, *A Single Man*, among others.



Danielle's Oeuvre

Trip Abroad: Paris, of course, for all the reasons any design-loving girl would understand—plus the culture and my favorite food bar none

Weekend Getaway: New York City. The nonstop on Delta has been reinstated—an instant creative lift.

Most Memorable Find: A large, ceramic leopard that I glimpsed as I was about to leave Home Goods one day. I turned around and added “Carlotta” to my buggy. She holds court and is a conversation starter in my home.

Favorite Fashion Purchase: A white vintage Chanel dress with big fluffy sleeves in St. Germaine.

Fashion Obsessions: I love a no-name vintage find, but I’m also drawn to Balenciaga, Gucci, Dries Van Noten, and Rachel Comey.

Top Restaurant Choice: Chez Nous in Charleston. The intimate, historic, and rustic farmhouse attitude of the architecture combines with the delectable cuisine for a magical evening.

Dream Dinner Party: This is hard! I would love to dine with Karl Lagerfeld, Diana Vreeland, and the ever-inspirational Mick Jagger.



“The Brooklyn hipster scene inspired some choices. That idea of old-looking is cool again—sort of like needlepoint but framed in a more modern presentation.” —Danielle Balanis

CONVERSATION — PIECES

Gallery Walls

To invoke the high/low approach, Danielle suggests using old portraits (the subject matter doesn’t have to be related to you!), sketches, unframed art, metal sculptures, and architectural fragments. The sky is the limit, but the items in your grouping need to be visually engaging. And of course, scale is important. As Danielle explains, a gallery wall is all about breaking from monotony and creating a sensorial experience with opposing, clashing textures. Center the grouping at eye level, and don’t be afraid to hang something high or low, like the tiger in Joel’s living room. (Select pillows: Paige Albright Orientals)

Green With Envy

Chrome Green by Benjamin Moore was a bold choice for the small kitchen, but since it was only used on lower cabinets, it does not overpower the room. Shelves replaced the original upper cabinets to impart an airier look and also create display space for a few fun finds. The cafe curtain fabric is a snake motif. (Hardware: Brandino Brass)

Custom Details

As with many typical Crestline homes, there is no true main bedroom suite. To set off the room, Danielle wallpapered the hallway (Quadrille) and added a little vestibule before the entrance. She then installed double doors upholstered in black leather with a nailhead design (see Cover photo). In the dining room (at left), a custom upholstered cornice board adds panache to a double window.

Put it on a Pedestal

Many of us have plenty of books, and Danielle likes to put those tomes to work. In Joel’s hallway, a stack of favorite titles serves as a pedestal for cut greenery. Place smaller stacks beside seating for use as a cocktail table.





the art of the hunt

Danielle has mastered the balance of high/low—an especially important component when working with a firm budget. She and Joel agree that when looking for pieces, you need to be both intentional and open to surprise. “But don’t buy everything,” says the designer. “Be willing to leave things behind, even pieces you are drawn to. I compare it to when I go to a Zara store—I want everything because it’s so inexpensive, but there is no way I can wear all of it!”

luxury with a budget

“When using more expensive fabrics, wallpaper, and decorative pieces, a little can go a long way,” Danielle says. “Choose wisely. Cover chairs seats in a designer fabric, choose bespoke wallpaper for a bathroom or small hallway, or dress up a humble piece of art with an ornate custom picture frame. And remember, paint is inexpensive and transformative!”

Smart Style Strategies

Splurges

Zebra rug
Marble kitchen counters
Deep soaking bathtub
Jim Thompson moire silk for living room chairs
Fabric for bedroom curtain wall

Saves

Refacing existing kitchen cabinets
Subway tile from Home Depot
Bargain “as is” occasional chairs
Wayfair velvet sofa
CB2 burlwood dining table

Shopping Local

Joel and Danielle love vintage, one-of-a-kind finds. Here are some of their favorite go-to sources:

Urban Suburban
Mary & Wilma
The Nest
Maison

Paige Albright Orientals
@stash_bham
Roman Brantley Art & Antiques
Local estate sales