

Open House: Dallas

Decorating is so often about injecting life into snoozy situations. As **Editorial Director Joanna Saltz** finds out, these five Dallas designers are all about having some fun.



Joanna Saltz
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Want to talk? E-mail me at editor@housebeautiful.com.



Amy Berry
@amylberry

Jo Saltz: OK, let's jump in. When a room is feeling bare and boring, what's your go-to for making it more fun?

Monica Wilcox: Art, art, art—*original* art. Find an artist to create something individual, unique, one-of-a-kind. Introduce your clients to art, and you will never ever go wrong.

Brant McFarlain: I like to arrange furniture in a way that's not typical. You get architectural plans and it seems to be the same layout

all the time, but mine would never look like that. For me it's more about the placement of things, rather than color.

Jean Liu: I've had clients completely change the way they felt about a room just because we took the existing pieces of furniture and tweaked the layout of them.

Amy Berry: Right. And there needs to be a playfulness, like, "You can live here! Yeah, you can move that chair, it's OK!"

Denise McGaha: It's our job to take this perfect little bow that interior design has been tied with and kind of blow it up.

Jo: Is it more fun to have tons of money for a project, or to have to get creative on a budget?

Amy: It's fun to have a fun client. With one client, there was a closet where I said, "We should make it a dollhouse!" They have a little girl, so we did a whole hidden bookcase she can walk into. There's a little light fixture, a little kitchen. The dad was like, "What are you doing to my closet?" And I was like, "It will be fine, and we can turn it back into a closet later." That's how trusting they were.

Jean: Totally agree. The clients who trust you—who are so trusting they don't even check in with you—can make a project come in a lot smoother, and



Brant McFarlain
@brantdesign



"I'll say, 'I love dark rooms!' to kind of guide a client toward a bold decision," Brant says. Case in point: these suede-like Venetian-plaster walls in one of his projects.



For the daughter of some adventurous clients, Amy turned an empty closet into a child-size dollhouse.

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even under budget, because they're not micromanaging every decision.

Brant: That said, a huge budget is fun. One project I finished last year was the penthouse of the Ritz. It's 5,000 square feet, he's a bachelor, and he just trusted me to do my thing.

Denise: Is that your perfect client profile?

Brant: Perfect client. He had grandma furniture in there, and



Monica Wilcox
@mwilcoxdesign

Monica matches the music she plays at a reveal to the mood of the room, so this chilled-out living area was presented with jazz.

Denise McGaha
@denisemcgaha



I was like, "Let's move this out!"

Denise: People get to see themselves in a completely different light when you change their interiors.

Brant: Well, now he's cool.

Jean: Ha! At the same time, we've had some great things

come out of the tightest budgets. We're working on the new showroom for KOCH, a clothing line. This project does not have a crazy budget, so every single fabric we're using is actually a remnant from their current collections.

Monica: That's amazing!

"People get to see themselves in a completely different light when you change their interiors. They get a whole new persona!"

—DENISE MCGAHA

Jo: What is the most fun part of your job? [Note to transcriber: We are now two glasses of wine deep.]

Denise: I love presenting to the client and make a really big deal out of it. We serve their favorite treats, and I know what they like to drink. I had a client last week say, "Oh my God, do you have people who are addicted to this like plastic surgery?" Then she looked at her husband and said, "When do we get to do the next part of the house?"

Brant: I mean, I do like presenting—but not as much as you do.

Denise: I love it.

Monica: For me, the most fun part is definitely the reveal. We have bets in my office on who's going to cry—our goal is actually to make people cry! We do everything we can. We light candles. We even have music.

Denise: It's an experience!

Monica: Yes! A celebration.

Amy: It's kind of your moment to be like, "I was listening."

Jean: The most fun for me personally is the process. I love working with the different trades, because I think that they're the most unsung part of any project. They're the ones who have to get it done!

Jo: So true. And what a diverse mix of answers.

Denise: We're Texans! We're individuals.



Jean's mood board for the new KOCH showroom, where all the fabric she's using is left over from their clothing lines.

Jean Liu
@jeanliudesign

