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Troy Bankord

Creating Places of Peace

By Jay Pentrack

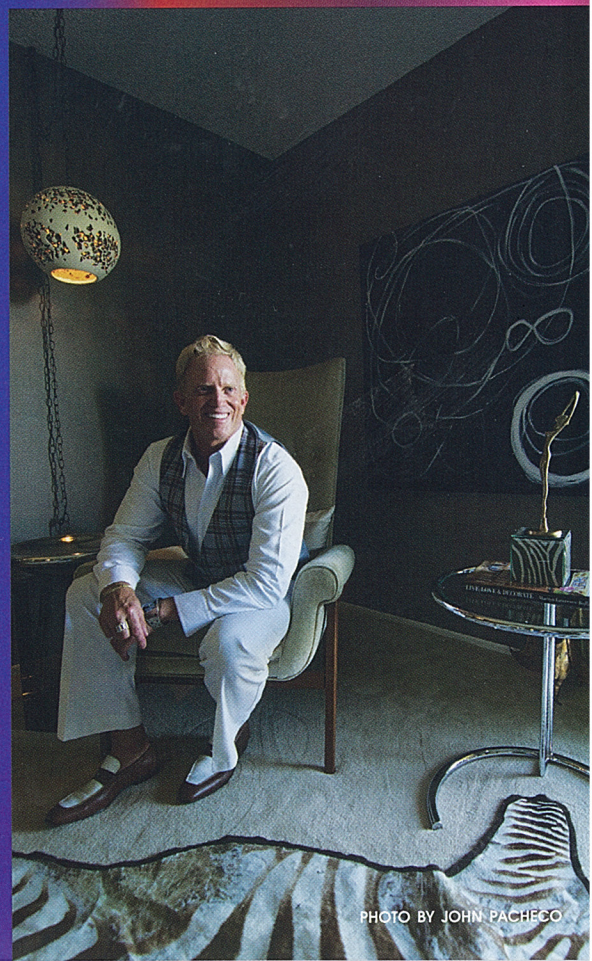
All indications are that Troy Bankord was born to design. It is in his DNA. His childhood was spent living on five acres in rural Illinois in a Georgian brick mansion built in the Civil War by an English sea captain. “The walls were all red brick and three feet thick and the basement was limestone with a huge coal furnace. It would remind you of Hansel & Gretel, you could throw dead bodies in there,” Troy said laughing.

His parents were designers that invested a loving 11 years renovating their mansion, an experience that left a lasting impression on young Troy who appreciated the hard work that went into the project and ingrained in him the Midwestern work ethic that drives him today.

Family vacations were spent scouring Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia and Pennsylvania for antiques and furnishings with the kids crowded into the family station wagon, a U-Haul trailer hitched to the back for transporting the treasures discovered on the family adventure.

Troy’s family was refined and sophisticated. “My Grandmother was full-blooded French and very sophisticated and always wore hats and heels. My Grandfather would always wear a shirt and tie and a jacket and a hat,” Troy offered. “My Mom’s home growing up was featured in *Better Homes and Gardens*. I think my whole design aesthetic goes back there.”

Despite the family business, Troy’s parents discouraged him from making it his profession. “I wanted to go into landscape architecture and my parents, and they





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DESIGN PHOTOS COURTESY OF TROY BANKORD

admit this, they dissuaded me from doing this,” Troy explains. “Growing up in the Midwest, their mentality was at that time, that you live in the same house for 40 years. People don’t move like they do now. They never thought that I would move to Arizona or California. Who does that? ‘Do you want to plow snow in the winter for six months if no one is landscaping’ [they asked]. So I dismissed it.”

College was not a great experience for Troy who hated the entire process. Majoring in business was a nightmare so he changed majors mid-stream to English and journalism. Originally hoping to be a weatherman, Troy realized that starting at the bottom was not for him. So he packed his belongings and moved to Arizona in the Fall of 1986, staying with his cousin Barbara and her husband who just happened to be landscape designers. Troy accompanied her on installations of desert gardens and finally embraced his passion. “She knew I was involved in landscape and design my entire life; she had seen what I had done. So she planted this seed and said ‘you know

we could use some really great contractors and maintenance people in the southwest.’ And that was it.”

When you see his work, his creations, it is difficult to fathom that Troy is self-taught. “I guess it’s genetics I don’t know, or something moved me; maybe we’re all the same but we’re just inspired by different things,” he said. And while his interior design is breathtaking, he believes the exterior of the home is equally if not more important. “I think when people think about their relationship to God they don’t think about the sofa in their living room. They think about the mountains, the trees, the birds, the flowers, the streams,” Troy said. “I think for me, my existence is very spiritual and what I do for work I think is very spiritual. It’s inspiring for me and it’s kind of a religious experience when I change people’s lives and I heighten their awareness of nature or their existence with God or the universe or mother nature and to me that comes more through exterior than interior.”

A fan of architect and designer Frank Lloyd Wright who believed



“When you just see a house sitting there with nothing or you have tall trees and grass and there is nothing in between tying it together, it never feels one with nature. “

that structures should be in harmony with their environment which he called “organic architecture,” Troy’s designs duplicate nature. “I’ve never studied design principles, I’ve never studied feng shui; for me it’s all about duplicating nature. Like when I look here [Palm Springs], it’s all about layers, you’ve got the mountains, the high trees, the small trees, the low shrubs, the groundcover and the lawn; the house is nestled in among these layers,” he explains. “When you just see a house sitting there with nothing or you have tall trees and grass and there is nothing in between tying it together, it never feels one with nature. That’s what you do inside a home, you kind of duplicate nature only you are bringing in accessories and furniture and plants in a natural way.”

One of Troy’s gifts is the ability to “see” what will work for a client. “I’m very intuitive and also having done this for 30 years you learn how to read people. I think the intuition that I have tells me a lot. I can read people’s energy and figure out what would move them and what they would like in their garden or in their interior,” he said. “I have to dig deep and figure out who they are and how they entertain and their lifestyle and what really moves them and blows up their skirt, their design skirt [laughs]. Then I go from there.”

Energy is paramount to Troy whose designs are intended to create a “cocoon” effect for his clients. “For me, everything is about circular energy. I want to keep my clients’ energy within themselves and I want to keep the world out. I don’t want any negative energy. I don’t want the neighbors energy to flow through the yard. I want it all to be cocooned in their [the clients’] space,” he said passionately. “I don’t know



PHOTO BY JOHN PACHECO



why, that is just what feels right to me. Everybody has an aura and their own energy and I look at it as the circle of their lot or their home, their life, their spiritual center, their sanctuary.”

His business in Arizona thrived and Troy, incorporating his background in journalism with his design, penned a column in the magazine *Phoenix Homes and Gardens*.

But there was something about Palm Springs that recalled the small town feeling Troy had growing up. Business and pleasure brought him to the desert often. “I had been coming to Palm Springs for about 25 years, back and forth for vacations and to attend the Palm Springs Modern Committee events and tours and architecture and cocktail parties and fundraisers,” he said. In the Summer of 2011 he took on a project for clients he befriended attending the Mid-Century Modern events in Palm Springs and began dividing his time between Phoenix and the desert. “They [the clients]

were nice enough to allow me to stay in the house when I would come to town. So I would stay in their home and work on this garden and schlep plants back and forth and meet with installers. The more I was here the more I would hang out at Tropicale for dinner and meet people at the bar. It was just really easy to meet people and the more I was here, the more people recognized me and I think they assumed I was a local.” And in the Fall of 2011, Troy became a local, moving lock, stock and barrel to Palm Springs.

This summer, Troy will embark on a new adventure – television. The reality show, called “Allt för Sverige” gives Swedish-Americans the chance to visit the land of forefathers and explore their past. “The show is about Americans of Swedish descent going back to discover their roots and in so doing discovering more about themselves,” Troy explained. “The last five years or so I have had this desire to go to Scandinavia. Part of it is because of my roots but another

part is they say [with] Scandinavians it’s about form and function and their appreciation and admiration for nature and living healthily; a lot of that is very much me. I want to know if that comes from my parents or if it something that actually goes back to being Scandinavian. I want to go there and see how the design resonates with me and on how many levels and on which levels; I want to see what that brings to the surface.” Troy was one of 40 finalists selected to appear on the show. Additionally, Troy will celebrate another milestone in his life – he will turn 50 while filming the show in Sweden!

Var trygg i din resor Troy. Vi ser fram emot din hemkomst och berättelser från din stora äventyr.. Translation: Be safe in your travels Troy. We will look forward to your homecoming and tales from your great adventure.

Episodes of the show are available online at www.svt.se/allt-for-sverige. Visit Troy’s website at www.TroyBankordDesign.com.