



FORECAST FOR REIGN

Rising-star designer Chandos Dodson stakes a claim as Texas' very own queen of décor, where fab design—not all the drama—rules!

| By Deborah Mann Lake | Photography by Julie Soefer |

Chandos Dodson grew up in Houston surrounded by antiques at her mom's shop. But it's her ability to create clean, richly detailed contemporary spaces that has landed her on the edge of interior design in Texas. Her clients—who include cool bachelors in Dallas and Houston, and the family of a beautiful H-Town socialite—have been wowed. And that's no coincidence. Dodson, 34, basically earned the equivalent of a PhD in interior design after working with décor demi-gods Greg Jordan and Naomi Jeff in Manhattan.

"There's no better place to cut your teeth than in New York," she says, "where you have the most beautiful things at your fingertips. I got to experience working in a lot of different realms, contemporary being one of those. It pushed me to a different level."

And Dodson's A-List training didn't just inform her sense of style. It also helped bring about her particular take on low-key designer-client relations. "I like as little drama as possible because interior design is a chaotic world," as the self-described "undrama queen" puts it. "People come to me to create a sanctuary, a place to escape and have serenity and peace."

But don't think "Zen." We're talking potent, sexy design here. For three recent clients, Dodson has reinvented the notion of "contemporary" (which can seem an uninspired genre, falling somewhere on the décor spectrum between the safety of traditional and the edginess of full-on modern). In Dodson's hands, contemporary gets upgraded beyond the relative boredom of greige on greige. Mirrored glass tables and Barcelona leather chairs meet Murano chandeliers and Deco pieces in rooms that feel bold and at the same time polished and pulled-together. It's her own perfect storm—a phenomenon that won her top honors last year from the American Society of Interior Designers.

One Houston bachelor, a big-deal developer, called on her when he found himself in trouble three months into a remodel. Why her? "She's so pretty," the man grins. And so she is. Tall and blonde, the designer dresses the part, hair pulled back and wearing, on one recent work day, a smart cashmere black dress—*never* a suit—with an Hermès scarf and high black boots.

"You're judged by your appearance," says Dodson, who herself just moved into a new home in the Galleria area's leafy Lynn Park. "Decorating a house is not a paint-by-numbers scenario. You want it to be interesting and have character. I like things to be unique and different—and that's probably one of the reasons I don't wear a suit. Clients are looking for me to represent a certain sense of warmth and comfort."

The client's River Oaks home was finished a year later, the Dodson stamp was unmistakable, down to the doorknobs. Just shy of modern, the front door, a heavy steel structure inset with panes of glass that announces the clean design, opens to the dining area, a perfect snapshot of Dodson's work with the 51-year-old homeowner. A lacquered tortoise shell, common in 18th-century antiques and purchased from Area furniture store, hangs on the dining-room wall in an organic contrast to the slick backdrop. And a lacquered goatskin side table from Ron Seff in the master bedroom, and the living-room coffee table of



Above: For her River Oaks bachelor's project, designer Dodson painted chocolate doors (Stone Brown from Benjamin Moore), which mesh well with such custom additions as an oversized bookshelf by Calloway Builders. At right: In the living room, a driftwood sculpture from Carl Moore Antiques sits next to a TV console custom-designed by Dodson and built by C&G Furniture. The sofa is a Kreiss woven-leather-framed piece in a linen-velvet fabric by Clarence House. Opposite page: Barcelona chairs and a Robert Kelly painting above a clear lucite console enliven the living room.





On left, from top: The designer found just the spot in the River Oaks bachelor's house for a breakfast table from Kuhl-Linscomb and Lulu-fabric-covered chairs from Ellouise Abbott. The stairwell railing was created by Roth Metal Works, and a piece from artist William Betts' 'Striped Series' dots the wall. Dodson sits for a moment in a corner of her developer client's bedroom. Opposite page, from top: The dining room of the Houston home features taupe silk walls, a '20s Deco trestle table (purchased from Robert Akler), chairs custom-made by C&G, a Biedermeier cabinet and screen prints by James Nares. A rainbow wall-hanging by David Hutchinson (from Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery) and Ross Bleckner's 'Falling Birds III' brighten another stairwell.



vintage zinc, also serve to break up the clean lines.

The client gave her free rein in the bathrooms. Dodson brought in mother-of-pearl wallpaper tiles by Maya Romanoff in the powder room. Upstairs, a free-standing tub by Wet from Elegant Additions constantly overflows into the "wet" area in the master bathroom, which means the bath water (with its own source of instant heat) never gets cold.

Dodson's knack for finding that just-so item—for the River Oaks bachelor and other clients—takes her to Houston sources such as Kuhl-Linscomb, a five-showroom design store, for accessories like Bernaud table settings. She also favors the Decorative Center's Ellouise Abbott showroom with its mod-minded pieces such as Allan Knight's Lucite tables and hand-painted wallpaper by Rusty Arena. Dodson frequents the Longoria Collection for touches such as Hermès flatware and Buccalati silver picture frames. "I shop everywhere to find the right vocabulary that speaks to everything else in the house."

The designer also worked with art consultant Laura Drexel to select works from regional modern artists for all three of her projects. They chose pieces by Sante Fe-born Robert Kelly, a painter whose work appears at Houston's Barbara Davis Gallery; colorful linear-oriented pieces by William Betts; and Angelina Nasso's brightly hued, nature-inspired oils on canvas.

As with the Houston developer's house, another project—this time for a single, 30-year-old businessman in Dallas—echoes good taste rather than shouting "bachelor pad!" Clean lines and a masculine palette are mixed with more traditional fabrics and shapes to soften it. Designed by Oglesby-Greene, a multiple winner of awards from the Dallas chapter of the American Institutes of Architects, the pink stucco Southwestern-style home is carved out of a hill that overlooks a creek in the Devonshire neighborhood.

The theme began in part with a large family cabinet, an inlaid antique that she mixed with a traditional sofa, butterscotch leather chairs, an Art Deco sofa table and a mirrored coffee table. A modern painting by Mike Springett, with a streak of black and shot of red against white, is an exclamation point above the fireplace. Almost formal tufted banquettes covered with natural linen-silk are offset by small round tables on horn legs (a nod to Texas, which the homeowner wanted). "It was perfect," says the homeowner, whose family is in the sports entertainment industry. "She did all the work, and I didn't have to do anything. On the first shot, I knew it was what I wanted."

What he wanted, it seems, was a woman's touch. In fact, his only hesitation was the mirrored coffee table, which he thought a little too feminine for his guy's-guy personality. "Chandos said, 'Trust me. Give me a week,'" he remembers. "And after a week, I liked it. She broadened my vision of what design could be."

Chandos explains: "Men get used to things, and it takes them a while to appreciate something new and to understand what the piece or element does for the environment. Men are horrible about this."

She did not have any macho hangups to overcome in the project she did for H-Town's Robin Reimer



and her hubby Charles, an energy-biz exec. The house, near Highland Village, has Dodson's contemporary spirit, but with a more monochromatic, romantic air. Bone-frame chairs share living room space with square-shaped chairs upholstered in silk-velvet, rare Art Deco side tables and a glass-topped metal coffee table.

Robin, a pretty blonde of 34, answers the door holding her blind miniature schnauzer, Abby. "I like how she created an open, airy and inviting atmosphere that lends itself to entertaining," says Robin, who regularly holds meetings and throws parties as part of her fundraising for animal charities. "I love her use of







Clockwise from top: The home of Dodson's Dallas client was carved from a hillside in the Devonshire district. In its living room, tufted linen banquettes and butterscotch leather chairs add warmth and understated glamour. Beneath art by Katsumi Hayakawa, there's a console made from an old iron railing. Opposite page: In the same room, Dodson combined statement features, like a mirrored table, a Mike Springett painting and big-game horns from Africa.



neutral colors mixed with luxurious fabrics, which add a touch of glamour.”

Reimer’s favorite space is the meditation room, where she recharges her batteries by reading or taking a nap on the canopied daybed. Crystal-bead wallpaper, a stacked faux-leopard ottoman from Shabby Slips and a Moroccan bone mirror mix things up.

All three projects—the bachelors’ homes in Houston and Dallas, and the Reimers’ house—were finished in the past year. And now Dodson has plenty

more on her plate. Her front passenger seat holds a lampshade and the back of the black Chevy Tahoe is filled with sofa cushions for yet another project.

“People think this job is glamorous, but you go from being in the owners’ box (at a professional sports game) to spending the whole day with painters and dealing with nails in your tires,” she says. “There’s some kind of drama every day, because the home is so emotional to people. You have to kind of be the calm in the middle of the storm.” ■

The Dallas home’s entry hall features pine floors that were hand-scraped to return them to a natural shade. The driftwood lamp and zebra rug are from Area, and the traditional wingback chair is upholstered in chocolate linen.

For the Reimers of Houston, the designer devised a unique 'meditation room,' which features pretty details like a coffee table from Ellouise Abbott, a delicate Boyd light fixture and a custom-made Joseph Co. club chair with a velvet cover by Bergamo. The ornamental 19th-century box on the side table is made of mother-of-pearl.

