

MARK BOONE



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An eye for design

BY SHERRY BITHELL

Even at the age of eight, Mark Boone (interior design '88) was fascinated by design. He recalls spending hours designing doll-sized furniture in his family's small basement woodshop. When Boone wasn't putting finishing touches on his designs, he was reading "old, sun-bleached copies" of *Architectural Digest* in the family sunroom. Today, that publication lists Boone as a member of its prestigious AD 100, a listing of the world's top architects and designers.

Boone began his professional journey at Virginia Tech. Although he entered as a marketing major, he soon switched to interior design. "I found that I wasn't following my true calling," he explains. "I definitely wanted to run a business, yet my passion was really for design." After beginning the design curriculum, Boone also continued taking courses in the business curriculum.

Post-graduation, "I packed up my giant black portfolio and went to Washington, D.C., to search for a job," Boone says. "It

was summer and it was sweltering and I was beating the pavement, interviewing with large architectural and design firms." While visiting one prospect, he had a chance meeting with the vice president of renowned furnishings company Baker Knapp and Tubbs, who happened to be there for the day. "He took an impromptu glance through my portfolio and said, 'How would you like to work in Chicago?'"

In a snap, Boone went from the classroom to his own office. "It was a pretty exciting journey for a boy from Roanoke. Suddenly, I was enjoying an office view of the Chicago River, a 40th floor apartment, and traveling all over the country to work with Baker's showrooms."

Yet it turned out to be too much of a good thing. Boone was sometimes traveling three weeks out of the month and didn't have time to make friends or even really settle in Chicago. "It was a bittersweet situation," Boone says, "and I ended up quitting my job. When I called my mother to say 'I just quit this



A living room that Boone designed for a 20,000-acre ranch in Colorado in 2003.

custom designs furniture. His firm takes on a limited number of design projects each year to remain intimately involved with each one it accepts.

"I only take projects that really make sense for both the client and me. It's like going on a semi-blind date," Boone elaborates. "The client knows something about your work, but you know nothing about them, so you have to see if the chemistry is there. You're going to be closely involved for at least two years and hopefully friends forever, so I appreciate the luxury of choice. I work with lovely people."

Boone was his own client when he bought his first home, a 1920s English cottage-style house in Los Angeles. When the house was finished, it graced the cover of *Architectural Digest's* "Designer's Own Home" issue in September 2002—a childhood dream realized.

His designs continue to be featured in the magazine. From the basement to Beverly Hills—that's quite a career arc.