





DESIGNS

OBJECTS OF

Creativity in the Capital Region is on an upswing

By Andrea Kennedy

Among the Capital Region's top-notch talents, some designers stand out for their ingenuity, skill and varied contributions to the fabric of local culture. Covering the disciplines of architecture, fashion, gastronomy, graphic design and product fabrication, these producers channel their passions to elevate local aesthetic, enhance the region's design community, and provide superior products. They showcase the region's artistry, employ its craftsmen, and invigorate the commerce of good design. Enhancing the valley's beauty and business, here are some of our region's premiere designers ...

INSIDE

Maria Ogrydziak

Architect, Maria Ogrydziak Architecture

Veteran architect Maria Ogrydziak is inspired by the unconventional.

"I don't like the idea of being somewhere where everything is prescribed," she says. A graduate and former professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and president elect of the American Institute of Architects, Central Valley Chapter, Ogrydziak has designed hundreds of regional spaces from residential to commercial to spiritual. Her style uses innovative shapes, materials and colors to create connections from the indoor living space to the outdoor world, embracing what she calls "the hereness of here."

"Everything I build," Ogrydziak says, "I try to make connected to the land or to the place I'm working in." At a sprawling residence she designed in a Woodland field, Ogrydziak installed a series of massive, sliding glass doors that open more than 100 feet to connect the home to the surrounding land. Designing from the inside out, she highlights the best views, sunsets or, one of her favorites, the sky. "I think the sky is one of those amazing elements that we sometimes forget. It's looking at the infinite."

Beyond the naturescape, Ogrydziak also customizes each structural concept to the surrounding community. When she redesigned the Davis Food Co-op in the late '90s with her son, Luke, they shot life into a sleepy grocery store by introducing a progressive angular entrance, ultra-bold façade lettering and local artwork. To emanate regional agriculture, she introduced a strong, green motif (long before being green got hip). When the building was completed in 1998, it received the AIA California Council Honor Award.

When designing the Islamic Center of Davis, Ogrydziak blended her characteristic architecture stylings with ancient concepts of Islam. "The group wanted something they could be proud of, where they could be a visible member of the community," she says.

Inside the traditional mosque, Ogrydziak's high windows invite sky views in the direction of prayer. Outside, a non-traditional blue, steel façade, dome and minaret announce the mosque's presence on Davis's busy Russell Boulevard. Ogrydziak designed cutouts of lettering and symbolic patterns that allow light to project through the steel. On the heels of her lauded work, she's been approved to design the new annex at the mosque in Sacramento.





Brian Schmitt

Product Fabricator, Schmitt Designs

Brian Schmitt speaks in humble, unassuming tones but, like his products, makes a powerful statement.

Design lovers across the globe have responded. Celebrated in prominent design blogs and catalogs, his eco-friendly, locally fabricated mobiles, pendant lights and clocks grace modern art shops and lifestyle boutiques from California to Malaysia.

"I think people respond to the warm modern design," Schmitt says. "A lot of times modern design is chrome, sharp edges and shiny surfaces; really austere minimalism. This design is warm materials with a level of detail, but not embellishment."

Trained in industrial design in the states and in Germany, this former Pottery Barn designer first created mobiles by experimenting with scraps of bamboo at cabinetmaker Alter-Eco. "I always liked mobiles. They're kind of this autonomous sculpture ... they have a personality of their own, and it's just an interesting sculptural accent to a room."

Six years after launching Adrift Mobiles, the Schmitt Design line now produces ten mobiles, three lighting pendants and three clocks. Each work emanates artful craftsmanship in balance, form and movement. Inspired by nature, Schmitt uses materials including sustainable wood veneer and bamboo certified by the Forest Stewardship Council. "I always think about the environmental attributes of the material before I use it," he says.

Schmitt also considers his production line, hiring local workshops for processes like photochemical etching and laser cutting. "I really believe in feeding business to local fabricators," he says. "It makes it a richer texture if we have all different types of businesses in the community."

Recently expanding into delicate metal mobiles powder-coated with pops of color, Schmitt now has his eye on softer textures and more custom work, including his 40-foot mobile at New York's Empire State College and his three-story, free-standing design at this year's Burning Man. A disc jockey by night, Schmitt and friends installed the mobile and used it as a gathering space on the Nevada playa. "I got to DJ under the mobile at sunrise for a group of my best friends," he says. "It was an incredible experience."

ADRIFT INDUSTRIAL

STRUCTURAL INTEGRITY

Dustin Littrell

Architect, Popp Littrell Architecture

Since his childhood days in the Midwest, Dustin Littrell has been a self-proclaimed architecture geek.

"I started with Legos and ended with [building information modeling]," he says. Now 32 and a licensed architect, Littrell has designed for local architecture firms, including Mogavero Notestine Associates, Vrilakas Architects and Stafford King Wiese Architects, and has lent his vision to parts of hometown projects like the Firestone Building and Old Soul Co.'s alley space.

Currently partner at Popp Littrell Architecture, Littrell designs contemporary commercial and residential spaces while setting his progressive vision on more unconventional tides.

Littrell's work redesigning the Fruitridge Health and Wellness Collective first introduced the region to marijuana dispensaries touting "high design." "It's a boutique dispensary," Littrell says. "We think of marijuana like it is jewelry or chocolates or cigars."

Without local precedent, Littrell forged a modern, clean design and commissioned Curtis Popp to supply sleek, custom furniture. In an unorthodox yet unforgettable spin, he lined the space with custom wallpaper featuring big, bold arrows and embedded pot leaves. "Yes, it's a dispensary, but no one would know," Littrell says.

Littrell's architectural impact on Sacramento extends well beyond his standing structures; he also contributes pro bono as a local design activist. Littrell was nominated as associate director of the American Institute of Architects, Central Valley Chapter, and in his own neighborhood of Oak Park, he currently sits on the Redevelopment Advisory Committee and earlier this year led a successful appeal to redesign the incoming Fresh & Easy Neighborhood Market to respect the visual heritage of the historic community.

Between architecture and activism, folks can find Littrell practicing yoga with his wife, a local instructor. Meanwhile, he strives to restore the service of architecture in form, function and accessibility to the public of Sacramento. "When it comes to architecture here," he says, "there's still so much to be done."





Caren Templet

Fashion Designer

If local fashion phenom Caren Templet had it her way, she would spend every day sewing couture dresses.

"I like to sew the big ones, secretly. That's what I would do all day long," she says. Instead, this petite powerhouse runs her flagship store on 18th and L streets four days a week, wowing high society with her seasonal lines, custom couture and runway shows. Unfazed by her secured spot in regional designer discourse, Templet does not waver from her old-school philosophy of hands-on skill and service.

"My mother raised four of us and made all our clothes," she says. Templet did the same for her four children, plus bedspreads, curtains and you name it, perfecting her craft at San Francisco's Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising when she came to the states less than a decade ago. Values passed down from her mother translate to Templet's designs in practicality, tailoring, quality, comfort and decency. "That's not to say they're not fun," she says.

With an eye for natural femininity and subdued sexuality, Templet's designs boast pleats, petticoats and puffed sleeves in cross-palette colors and luscious, often shimmering, fabrics. Clothier for music awards, political functions and weddings from California to New York and Washington D.C., Templet says, "I don't dress women that they look so overdone that you can't see her. I'll just give them the extra 25 percent. They've already got the other 75."

When not in her shop, Templet is likely in Los Angeles serving clients at her Hermosa Beach studio, hunting fabrics, sewing her favorite dresses, or ensuring her production facility performs at the superior standard reserved for couture — a standard, she says, from the bygone days of valued ateliers and devoted apprentices. "That's how fashion used to be," she says.

While one hand embraces her roots, the other embraces her future. With the pending launch of her online store at carentemplet.com, Templet focuses on New York Fashion week and beyond. "If [Saks Fifth Avenue] knocks on the door and wants a thousand quality skirts," she says, "I'm ready."

DESIGNING WOMEN

DO WE GOT THAT

Mike Ward

Chef de Cuisine, Lounge ON20

Mike Ward is part family man, part musician and part culinary mad scientist. “Our kitchen,” he says, “we call it a laboratory.”

As Chef de Cuisine at Lounge ON20, Ward — or Chef Mike, as he’s called in the lab — designs delicacies using molecular gastronomy. Specializing in charcuterie, the smoking and curing of meats, Ward trained under such lauded chefs as Boston’s Tony Maws and New York’s Carmine DiGiovanni before returning to his hometown. Now teamed with Chef Pajo Bruich, Ward strives to elevate the culinary potential he sees Sacramento. “I’m really striving to present charcuterie, especially to this region of California, in a new way to make it more exciting,” he says.

Indeed, Ward laces plates with excitement daily. His palette of local and seasonal ingredients combined with food chemistry know-how produces concoctions he terms “gels and gas steaks and crispy stuff and soft stuff and exploding stuff.”

In a charcuterie creation he pioneered, pâté rubbed with Louisiana spices gets a jet of bourbon-infused thermal gel. Heated to high temperature, the gel won’t melt.

“When you cut it,” Ward says, “you have this beautiful perfect circle in the middle that tastes like bourbon and honey.”

Another of Ward’s list of techniques takes pork fat submerged in a 2-week dry rub, then hangs it in the meat closet for another month. When sliced, “It just melts on your tongue,” he says, recalling the paradise of flavor.

Beyond charcuterie, Ward has skills for miles in the realm of molecular gastronomy. “We’re in the business of textures,” he says. “We find something that everybody knows and completely change your world about it.” He aerates pure blended basil to a whipped cream and creates flavor-packed peanut brittle thin as paper.

To spot Ward in the kitchen, look for the hefty goatee, a smile and one of his characteristic homemade bandanas. “I have a pink one ... that’s bedazzled,” Ward says. “That’s my Saturday night bandana.”





Barb Hennelly

Senior Designer, Fuel Creative

Barb Hennelly's style skews retro with a splash of pin-up and a twist of rock 'n' roll. Graphic designer, marketer, brander, art director, magazine entrepreneur, choreographer, costumer and burlesque performer (you read it right), Hennelly indulges her creative ADD all over town.

"I am, for some reason, driven to do this stuff that feeds my creative spirit," Hennelly says. "If I didn't, I would go crazy." That creative spirit and Hennelly's self-taught graphic design skills led her through myriad ad agencies before arriving at her current position at local hot spot Fuel Creative. Most recently, she led the campaign for the Rolex Monterey Motorsports Reunion at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca from concept through video production.

Perused Sacramento's Explore Midtown website lately? Hennelly is to thank for those bold home-page graphics and user-friendly navigation.

Before Fuel, Hennelly founded Romp Creative in 2009 with fellow design mind Jake Favour, lending her creativity to local banks, salons, the Downtown Sacramento Partnership and more. She let her vintage vision soar in designing posters for the Sacramento Zoo's Twilight Thursday car shows. "They wanted to emulate the rock 'n' roll gig posters of the '50s," she says. "Part of me feels like I'm from that time, so it's kind of just within me."

With the creativity of a small army — and spunk to match — in 2005, the mother of four also launched Kidaround, the local lifestyle magazine for modern families. She's since sold the magazine, but only after thoroughly stamping the brand with her nostalgic design, sassy spin, authentic discourse and flair for hilarity. In her 2009 "Breast Issue Ever," the cover photo featured watermelons instead of, you know. "I approach everything with a sense of humor; [it's] more important than anything else," she says.

Taking design from the page to the stage, Hennelly showcases her creative va voom with Sacramento burlesque troupe Sizzling Sirens. Beyond designing their show collateral, she co-produces, choreographs, costumes and bares (almost) all as dancer Skarlet Feverish. She finds inspiration from musicians, including her heartthrob, Dave Grohl; screenwriter Diablo Cody; and her late father, immortalized by a tattoo of his name on her wrist. She says, "I glean a lot of courage from what he lost."

GRAPHIC
FUELMORE