

COVER STORY

On the cover: Barry Harrison and Arturo Sanchez of the Art-Harrison Interior Design Studio of Birmingham work wonders, making such creations as sconces featuring shades made of coleus leaves. Staff photos by Jerry Zolynsky.



Magic in store: Barry Harrison (the Harrison of Art-Harrison) shows one of the designers' imaginative pieces, part of a current display at Neiman-Marcus in Troy. Art-Harrison made exclusive designs for the store.

Photo by Jerry Zolynsky

They're wizards by design

BY MARY KLEMIC, AT HOME EDITOR

Those Art-Harrison people are wizards by design. That's the Art-Harrison Interior Design Studio, where they work wonders transforming or enhancing old pieces and creating others. Their handcrafted items are made specifically for the customer's space and needs.

"We're designers, we're not just decorators," said Arturo Sanchez, who is a partner in the Birmingham business with Barry Harrison.

A retrospective of Art-Harrison designs is displayed throughout Neiman-Marcus at the Somerset Collection, Big Beaver Road and Coolidge in Troy, through the first week in September. Art-Harrison designed exclusive furnishings for the store.

Art-Harrison also consists of Roberts Murray and Shana Larkin, an intern from Michigan State University. The designers have taken on a wide variety of projects, including a small family on a farm and a large law firm.

"It doesn't take any skill to turn gold at a project," Sanchez said. Rather, it takes thought to work within budget constraints. He said one project stayed within a \$500 range.

"We did a real simple cottage-type

look," Murray said. "We made (the client) so happy."

Fun in style

The designers convey a sense of fun as well as of style. Old cedar chests or bureaus become functional flights of fancy, painted with scenes that include family members or family history. A child's desk features flat "flowerpots" that fit into grooves to stand as a display bookends, and a drawer that swings out in an arc to the side rather than straight ahead.

"We strive to make things different, that have never been seen," Sanchez said.

Among the pieces on display at Neiman-Marcus are sofa hide stools with bronze hardware and nickel-plated trim. The stools are flat so they can be used as tables as well as for seating. The tables belonged to the client.

Also featured at the store is an ottoman called "Lillian Mae Muffet" made by Judy Jones. With hand-painted fabric and silver leafed, futuristic-looking legs, benches and tables with hand-painted legs and hand-brushed finish, and benches with hand-painted wood and chrome made of coleus leaves.

One customer had a marble piece

from Franco. The designers used it as the top of a vanity table. The legs of the table were covered with suede, secured with tiny nickel tacks arranged in a curve to conceal the seam. The pastel tones of the marble matched the soft colors of the dressing room (converted from a spare room) where the table was placed.

For another client who collected lace, the designers fashioned an unusual display piece. The furnishing is like a ladder that hangs on a wall. Longer items can be draped in the back, while shorter ones can be arranged on shelves with copper backing, tilted for view.

In other projects, a kitchen was given a personal touch, with family members selecting different pieces of Pottery Barn to be arranged on the wall, and the designers devised a way to hang a large tapestry. Instead of laying flat against the wall, the tapestry curves — it has a forest scene, and the effect is like being in a forest.

Fun to use

These artisans work their magic with a number of tools and equipment.

"The jigsaw would be Jackson," Sanchez said.

Nothing goes to waste, and almost

anything can be put to use. A mahogany day bed Art-Harrison designed for a Detroit Symphony Orchestra Showhouse featured a sea-grass mattress.

"We like to use all different (types) of material," Harrison said.

The designers are particular about every detail. They painstakingly knotted material by hand to form a basket-weave look on some toffets.

"We make sure everything's right," Harrison said.

"We both work on every project."

They will present clients with gifts, such as a furnishing or accessory made of odds and ends from the project.

The business partners balance the avant-garde and the conservative. Sanchez studied industrial design at Center for Creative Studies and interior design at Wayne State University. Harrison, a member of the Kentucky Department of the Arts, studied fine arts at Eastern Kentucky University and at Morehead. The two later paintings at the Ashley-Clark Gallery in Greensburg.

These folks are in the design business a line of talented customers, but they will continue designing things in restaurants and homes.

"Half of our customers (customers) are our best friends," Sanchez said.