

## The Profile

## CALLED TO DESIGN

BITTNER'S  
Betsy Wall shares  
design trends and  
her philosophy

**Betsy Wall, Vice President, Bittners**  
**Photographer: Josh Merideth**  
**Hair design: Stephen Lewis**  
**Makeup: Jill Higgonbotham**  
**Stylist: Janice Carter Levitch**  
**Chair: custom made by Bittners**

By **FRANNY CORRIGAN GUENTHNER**  
 Special to The Voice-Tribune

As I enter Bittners, I am comforted by the warm welcome of Betsy Wall as she strolls among the exquisite showroom. On display are many different vignettes from living rooms and dining rooms to great office workspaces. I become enthralled by the visionary design I am experiencing and absorbing.

We soon settle down in the sunroom overlooking Main Street. Immediately, the soothing and calming creams envelop me as I sit on a rattan chair. An incredible hand-blown, glass-framed antique mirror reflects the warmth of Bittners. The pale, ocean blue chairs are complemented with beautiful pillows and cashmere throws. Antique silver boxes lie gracefully on a raffia grass cloth cocktail table reminiscent of designer Billy Baldwin. Behind Betsy is the Louisville Magazine “Best of Louisville” award. She mentions that Bittners also was ranked the No. 1 design firm by Business First.

We begin to talk, and Betsy’s passion for design is energizing. Her love began when she was a young girl. Her parents saw a talent in her and suggested a degree in architecture. After high school, she enrolled at the University of Kentucky and focused on architecture, but she soon found out that she loved design. She graduated with a bachelor’s degree from the College of Design and Architecture.

We settle into a very friendly conversation and I find her warmth, elegance and passion intriguing. We talk about her exceptional talent for visualization and begin by looking at the trends in design.

**What trends do you see in design today and in the future?**

Today, you are seeing softer, transitional colors and textures. More neutral colors and softer palettes provide an easy, soothing, safe environment. Mixing textures within these softer colors brings interest and depth to your home.

Home design is also being influenced by the fashion industry, and from this you are seeing more confidence in the use of color. More interesting color mixes and texture combinations are coming into the marketplace. Along with this, we see more attention to detailing your home. This means actually tailoring your furniture in unconventional ways – having your pieces upholstered in wonderfully detailed manners. This type of tailoring sets the quality of the piece.

The “green” movement is now being reflected in design. It has brought a lot of new creativity in the

“thinking” and use of resources into design. Our clients are more knowledgeable today and more conscientious of our environment.

**What is your design philosophy?**

First, “less is more.” Clutter creates stress. I am always clearing out rooms to make them more open.

Second, choosing fewer, but great furniture pieces with well-chosen colors and patterns. This can have a huge impact on a room.

Third, proper balance and scale are key to a room’s success.

**What are the design strengths here at Bittners?**

There are so many. We are so fortunate to have Bittners in Louisville. Coming from a smaller design firm, we did not have the resources and collaboration that we have here at Bittners. The list of our strengths is so long, here is a quick summary:

- **Full-service design firm** – We are truly the only “full-service” design firm in Louisville. We have “under one roof” all of our inventory, the area’s largest resource room, on-site cabinetmakers, very talented, energized design staff, a large diversified showroom, our own delivery personnel and ultimately a long, respected 150 years of design history.
- **Great resources** – Our staff, vendors and Douglas Riddle, our president, let us stay focused on creating the best in design. With all of our resources and streamlined systems in place, it is easy for a designer, like myself, to do what we do best.
- **Our history** – The history of Bittners goes back over 150 years! We are one of the oldest interior design firms in America. A German immigrant, Gustav Bittner, who handcrafted beautiful furniture pieces, started Bittners. His reputation built the great design firm that we are today.
- **Showroom** – We have here at Bittners one of the largest showrooms, and we welcome our clients to come in and browse all the wonderful lamps, pillows, furniture, lighting fixtures and unique gifts.
- **Custom cabinet shop** – No one else has a master craftsman on staff within walking distance from their design showroom! We are so fortunate to have our cabinetmakers right here. We use them for custom furniture pieces, refinishing, fixing antiques ... and the list goes on and on.
- **Merchandise** – As vice president, I am involved in numerous buying trips and keep up with the latest in unique merchandise. We also have educational seminars, hosted by our vendors, to keep us informed and constantly on the cutting edge with our merchandise.
- **Douglas Riddle, president of Bittners** – Truly, all

of these great benefits of Bittners would not come together without Douglas Riddle. He is very intuitive and empowers his employees to create the best in design. He has a finger on the “pulse of the design world” and is extremely creative, forward-thinking and a pleasure to work for.

**Who is your greatest inspiration?**

I have to say my family. My parents had four daughters and inspired a “can do” attitude. They pushed us to go beyond what we could ever have imagined. We all became very successful, independent women.

My husband, Harry, is vice president of wealth management at Merrill Lynch. He is the most solid and unpretentious person I know.

**What type of community service are you involved in?**

Today, I am on the board of trustees at Christ United Methodist Church and vice president of the Tri-Delta House Corporation board.

For many years, my son and I tutored elementary school children at the Portland Market Street Mission Center.

I have also been a past board member of the Boys and Girls Club and Junior League of Louisville. I have also served on the parent boards of Louisville Collegiate School, Sacred Heart Academy and St. Xavier High School.

**What is the greatest benefit of your profession?**

The wonderful personal relationships I have built over the years with my clients. They have become more to me than clients, and I cherish the enduring, loyal friendships.

**What is one thing that no one knows about you?**

I used to be in a band.

## Q&amp;A WITH BETSY WALL

Favorite restaurant: Jack Fry’s

Favorite book: “Catcher in the Rye.”

Favorite film: “Gone with the Wind”

Favorite vacation spot: Nantucket

Favorite artist: Mary Cassatt

Favorite Artists: Jackson Browne, The Beatles

Best Broadway show: “Les Misérables”

Unknown fact: Taking guitar lessons

Best quote: “Good is the enemy of great.”