

The *Visionary* Mr. Baker

William Baker is a lifestyle designer who infuses his work with Passion.

DON'T LET his easy-going manner and Southern charm fool you. When it comes to forming a vision, assembling a team, and executing a plan, William Baker is an expert. But his natural affability is only a part of the reason for his success as an internationally known designer of exquisite buildings. His ability to connect with people has given him a special talent for understanding consumers in order to give them what they want.

The multi-talented Baker is as hard driving as he is driven. He is a true renaissance man, an internationally recognized designer, a proven entrepreneur, an author of two books, and has degrees in corporate finance and an MBA from Emory University.

Baker has proven himself to be an adept manager of scarce resources to achieve maximum effect. His work reflects a keen eye for detail and an understanding of materials and of the manufacturing process.

William Baker founded his firm in Atlanta in 1985 and quickly came to dominate the market with his exciting designs. His buildings immediately

became the talk of Atlanta's toniest neighborhood known as Buckhead. Baker re-energized the architecture of Atlanta *his* way. His fresh new designs embraced craftsman-ship and used fine materials in inventive new ways.

In order to connect with the larger community, he has built strategic alliances, partnered with charity fundraisers, and has enlisted the press to publish his work. In other words, William Baker has mastered the game and understands its rules.

He concentrates on designing modern classics, whether they are houses, furniture, books, and, more recently, interiors- all of impeccable taste and quality. These two factors – taste and quality- are the keys to his success. And above all, he designs for the consumer's needs first, not his own.

Design is a serious business and even more so in this difficult economy. Baker feels confident that his reluctance to follow the latest trend has positioned him for these lean times because "my designs are timeless and will hold their own."

Over the years, Baker has received some very impressive attention. He has been awarded the prestigious *Arthur Ross Award* in New York and the *Urban Design Award for Excellence* in Atlanta. In the twelve months beginning in the Spring of 2008, he will have been published in national publications such as *Veranda*, *Southern Accents*, *Traditional Home*, *Suburban Classics*, *Trends*, and *The Modern Estate*.

On a personal note, William Baker was born in Nashville, Tennessee. His father was a noted furniture designer in his own right. Baker's talent for design was no doubt inherited from his designer father. Inspired by the grand Georgian architecture of his home town, he pursued architecture and then worked for the celebrated architect Stephen Fuller. Then he founded his own firm and the rest, as they say, is history.

During his time with Fuller, Baker strengthened his already high regard for quality. Baker says, "It's not just about passion, it's about proportion, scale, and rhythm." It is not difficult to tell that Baker is a passionate designer – he eats, lives and breathes design.

When he is at home, Baker is focused on his busy family's life. "My father used to say that children grow up before you know it, so I have made it a point to be involved with them on a daily basis." Baker lives in Atlanta with Carolyn, his wife of 18 years. Together they are raising their three teenage daughters in a historic home that could have come right out of London's Regent Park.

The rest of the time, Baker is tireless in his pursuit of creating his next great work. His workday is consumed with meetings with his A-list clients, on the phone with engineers or contractors, or on a plane bound for one of his many

jobs around the United States or the Caribbean.

When in the office, he is focused like a laser on the task at hand. He is a very efficient manager of his time. "I make the most of what time I have – not just my own, but also my employees' and my clients'," remarks Baker. Balancing many jobs in the air at one time takes discipline and Baker has shown himself up to the challenge.

As for the latest trends or fads, Baker says, "I am going to decide which are relevant to my designs. It can be a challenge to sort through all the hype about the 'latest and greatest'. For some designers, these can distract from the overall quality of their work. For me, however, there are timeless principles that transcend time and place - these are independent of fads - and these are what I incorporate into my works".

Each of Baker's designs has an elegant appeal that seems almost effortless. "Time is the ultimate arbiter of a design's success. If a work looks beautiful years after its inception, then you know you did something right. My goal is for my work to reflect the personality of its ultimate user and, in some way, the culture of its time.

The furniture Baker has designed, like his architecture, is timeless as well. "I take inspiration from the past to create something fresh and new that speaks to our own time." A bespoke table in his office, which he designed and commissioned, references the 18th century work of Robert Adam. Its rich carvings and embellishments add a level of detail seldom found in furniture design today. "I think it's a wonderful piece that I enjoy looking at every day. There is something new for the eye to see every time you look at it," he says. "That is the trademark of fine design."

So what type of client is he designing for? For one thing, they are informed consumers. His clients rank among the leaders of society and business. "By the time they come to me, they are very experienced end users and know exactly what they want. "My goal is to help them achieve their dream – to help that dream become a tangible reality."

When Baker talks about his special clients, he speaks of them more as personal friends - as someone who likes them, understands their lifestyle, and has their best interests in mind. The designs he creates for them have the kind of warm, family friendly appeal that gives them instant appeal. Whether it is an overall bold form or the smallest of details, Baker's passion for design comes through. As one long-time client says, "His use of craftsmanship, materials, texture, and color are quite extraordinary. His buildings don't shout at you - they seduce you."

Designs that seduce through their good taste is the key to Baker's success. By shying away from trends that quickly fall from favor, Baker is able to define himself in a unique way that has made him a favorite among industry insiders. "I can't even begin to count the number of industry leaders who have come to me over the years," he recalls. "It's been a lot."

Baker's use of subtle detail makes him an expert in inconspicuous consumption. "Today's consumers are more discerning than ever," he states, "and have many options when it comes to their purchases. For the wealthiest of these, they have the means but not the desire to show it off. They like their wealth to be understated, whether it is their cars, houses, planes, boats, or clothes. However, while they may choose the understated, the one thing

they will not compromise on is quality. They are discerning shoppers and want to maintain their high standards for quality. I find they often ask themselves, 'Which product is going to give me the best value?' Ultimately, their decision is about value and quality that meets their personal preferences."

As for the classic look he has so skillfully developed, he comments, "I have seen many highly touted designs that simply do not hold up to the test of time. Unfortunately, many of today's designers are just out for shock value. They are designing with the photographer in mind instead of the ultimate consumer. Sure, their work looks dramatic in professional photographs, with special lighting effects, but in real life it looks ridiculous. And, ultimately, it is real life that counts. "

For Baker, pleasing the consumer in real life is what it is all about.