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A Family TRADITION

By Colleen Ringer

BORN INTO THE BUSINESS, FURNITURE/INTERIOR DESIGNER MICHAEL KREISS IS CONTINUING HIS FAMILY'S TRADITION OF TOP-NOTCH FURNISHINGS AND STAND-OUT INTERIORS. THE DESIGNER'S NOTION OF SOFT CONTEMPORARY IS MAKING WAVES ON THE WEST COAST AND PROVING POPULAR ON A NATIONAL SCALE, BOTH INSIDE THE DWELLINGS OF THE RICH AND FAMOUS AND THE EVERYDAY HOMEOWNER.

YOU MIGHT SAY MICHAEL KREISS was born into the furnishing field's royal family. Over 60 years ago, the designer's grandfather Murray left his career with a silver company to begin his own importing business, which he appropriately labeled Kreiss. Today, the last name that has been molded and cared for by three generations is a well-known brand and interior design powerhouse with 19 showrooms throughout the country.

As a youngster, Michael hung around the family store in West Hollywood, always knowing that someday he would be working for the company his grandfather founded. After receiving a degree in political science from UCLA (which, he admits, hasn't come in handy) and a stint as a top-ranked tennis player (his brother, Bob, incidentally won Junior

Wimbledon), Michael began his destined career at age 20.

In the beginning, the designer was doing everything—running the cash register, opening boxes and driving trucks. “I started from the ground up,” he says. And up is exactly where he went. In 1975, Michael became president of the company and established its interior design component just two years later.

As president and chief executive officer, the designer is continuing what his relatives have spent more than 60 years doing—perfecting a unique design style with a global point of view. It was during the company's early years that the Kreiss brand became synonymous with high-quality, exotic imports. In fact, Murray was one of the first to import from Japan, and his son, Norman, continued the family

IN HIS FURNITURE COLLECTIONS, MICHAEL KREISS ADMITS HIS BENT IS
CLASSIC WITH A YOUNG, **contemporary** EDGE.

tradition by bringing in furnishings from Italy and the Orient. (Michael and his brothers often accompanied their parents on these trips around the world, and it is from those experiences that the designer draws most of his inspiration.) Today, the company upholds its high expectations for global goods through exclusive contracts with skilled artisans in Italy and the Far East.

In spite of the firm's worldly flair, it was in the early '70s—when it blended elegance and casual comfort to establish the California look—that the Kreiss name came out ahead of the pack. "We look to ourselves as one of the pioneers of the California look and that was an over-stuffed, natural, bleached, textured look," Michael says. However, even this style—just like the Golden State itself—has evolved to assimilate international influences.

So how does the designer define his own style predilections? "I started like a typical teenager with beanbag stuff," he says. "But I was always rather contemporary." In his furniture collections, Michael admits his bent is classic with a young, contemporary edge; for interiors, he prefers neutral, strong backgrounds emphasized by art, antiques and accessories—these treasured pieces are often hunted and gathered from far flung locales by the Kreiss family.

This philosophy has made believers out of big names such as Muhammad Ali, Kevin Costner, Michael Jordan, Bruce Springsteen and Britney Spears. "I think there's a certain chic-ness we have that [celebrities] like," Michael says. "It's not so haughty, and it's not as cold as some contemporary stuff can be." The most recent celebs to

fall under the Kreiss spell include Pete Sampras, Andre Agassi and Travis Tritt.

But the famous aren't the only ones falling for the company's soft contemporary look—regular folks are as well. "Contemporary often is hard-edged, chrome, glassy, cold, industrial," he says. "I'm really liking [the idea of furniture with] cleaner lines but with warmer materials, colors and [yet it's] still comfortable." These inclinations are reflected in lines like the company's Libra and Ares collections, which mix materials like wood and stone for a stunning yet simple look.

If you too find yourself falling for the designer's digs, you may decide to seek him out for a future project. But you should do a couple things to prepare for this partnership. In particular, Michael recommends collecting magazine clippings that illustrate your color and style preferences and knowing how you want to use the room in question. "Function first," he advises. After that, leave the rest up to him and his savvy crew. "The joy of the design department is to have people enjoy their home more," he says. "If they're proud and enjoy their home, we've done our job." ✨

ABOUT MICHAEL KREISS

For more information about Michael Kreiss, his work or his stores, call 800.573.4771, or visit www.kreiss.com.

Michael Kreiss on...



HIS STYLE IN A FEW WORDS

"Soft contemporary, comfortable contemporary."

HIS PERSONAL MOTTO

"I like to be a good sportsman—that includes working hard, playing fair and being an all-around good person."

COLORS FOR THE NOW

"Warm, neutral."

FAVORITE FABRICS

"Chenille and suede."

DESIGN RULES HE LIVES BY

"I don't like clutter."

FAVORITE PRODUCT TO DESIGN

"I love chairs and upholstery."

FORM OR FUNCTION

"I think it's function then you fill it with the right form."

FAVORITE IMPORT SPOT

"I think that Italy is the hottest place for importing. I think they are the style leaders."

ACCESSORIES DU JOUR

"I love hurricane shades. I love exotic boxes. I was just in the Orient and bought some boxes made out of shagreen which is the skin of a stingray. They're beautiful and dyed."

FAVORITE ROOM TO DECORATE

"The living room. It's the grand room, the great room. It sort of sets the stage analogous to an overture in a symphony, and all the other rooms satellite off of it. You want a whole house to flow."