

Are you room bored?

Here's some interior decorating advice for the style-challenged

by Tom Stevenson

Ernesto Garcia enjoyed a successful career as an architect but yearned to do something more. A creative force inside him was waiting to be set free.

It turned out he preferred the interior design side of the field. Once he made the jump, he never looked back.

Garcia now is president of Ernesto Garcia Interiors Inc., located at 9652 S.W. Beaverton-Hillsdale Highway. He is a member of the American Society of Interior Designers, a professional organization for which he not only had to pass an exam but also prove he could follow rigorous standards of acceptance. As a result, he has been brightening the lives, homes, offices, studios and even railroad cars for people across the country, making Portland his base of operations for the past 10 years.

Garcia, whose work has been featured in a wide variety of publications such as *Woman's Day* and *Better Homes and Gardens*, is also a successful business owner, operating a retail showroom with his staff of designers. The store is like a magical wonderland of interior decor, featuring items he has located during his global travels.

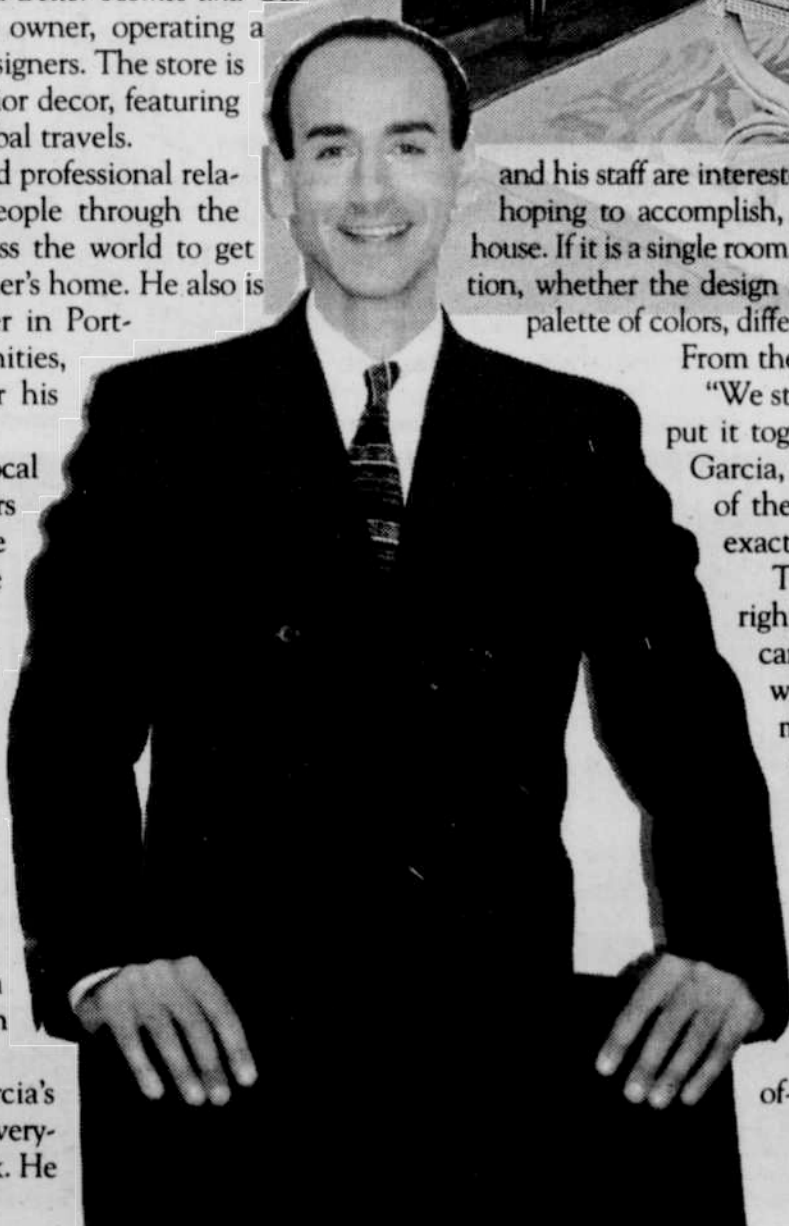
Although Garcia has established professional relationships with a group of craftspeople through the years, he is known for flying across the world to get exactly the right piece for a customer's home. He also is a recognized leader and fund-raiser in Portland's gay and Hispanic communities, garnering a number of honors for his work.

In addition, Garcia is a bit of a local television personality. He appears regularly on *AM Northwest*, where he shares decorating tips with the viewing audience.

All this aside, it is at his desk where he is most at home, helping customers transform their homes into the "safe and nurturing place" they seek. For many of us, putting together all of the facets of interior design is simply too daunting of a task, which is why they call in designers like Garcia.

"Most families want to make a home a home," he says. "We can help them do that."

When a customer enters Garcia's place of business, the first step is for everyone simply to sit down, relax and talk. He



and his staff are interested in finding out what the customer is hoping to accomplish, whether a single room or an entire house. If it is a single room, for example, they will discuss its function, whether the design should be traditional or modern, the palette of colors, different fabric styles and, of course, cost.

From there, his staff goes to work.

"We start working on a floor plan and then put it together in the form of a sketch," says Garcia, noting they photograph every aspect of the customer's home. "We show them exactly what the room will look like."

The customer gets to see everything, right down to the new furniture pieces, carpet samples, fabric pieces, artwork, window furnishings, lighting and more. Together, they all come up with a plan that meets the customer's needs, wishes and standards, and the process of getting it all together begins.

Garcia does the design work, then ships off his designs to the manufacturer. Need custom-designed carpet? No problem. Custom-designed furniture with one-of-a-kind upholstery? He can do it.

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Making your home a castle

If you have beaucoup bucks to redecorate your home or apartment, the options are endless. But tough economic times don't mean you are destined to live your life in a dreary home filled with plain color and little personality.

In fact, as the calendar turns toward those months when gray skies tend to bring every person's mood down just a notch, now is the perfect time to brighten up your life, according to Ernesto Garcia.

And with so many global fears overwhelming many people, he notes, the home becomes that much more important as a safe place. Recognizing that, Garcia says, means your living space must reflect who you are and what makes you feel happy.

"There is no place where you feel safer than at home," he adds. "We have seen people who have postponed projects make the decision to move forward [after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks]. They recognize that space can be nurturing...that beauty does nurture, and they are going forward rather than waiting."

It is not necessary to wait until you can afford an interior designer and major home furnishing purchases. With just a little creativity, Garcia insists you can do plenty at little cost.

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