



Bellissimo

Two PDX Interior Designers Making The World More **BEAUTIFUL** With Each Room

GERMANS HAVE COME TO BE KNOWN FOR THEIR AUSTERITY, BUT APPARENTLY NO ONE EVER TOLD RICHARD CODANTI THAT.

Codanti was born in Germany, but you'd never know it by walking into his store Bella Casa. The décor and furnishings there are ornate, following a traditional, old world aesthetic. The showroom is strategically arranged with rich leather, elaborate statuettes and jeweled picture frames.

In fact, the only thing austere about Codanti is his presence. His icy blue stare and soft voice turn the stereotype of the flamboyant gay designer on its head (For the record, Codanti says he didn't even know he was gay until he was 21 – when a coworker insinuated he might be). He also gives the impression of being strictly disciplined. To wit: At 13, he sold his bedroom furniture because he wanted to buy a living room set. At 18, he would charge a few extra dollars while babysitting to rearrange furniture – essentially his first in-home consultations. At 21, he owned his first home.

“I was always older than my age, as far as what I wanted,” he says. He's 44, by the way.

Now Codanti travels around the world searching for merchandise for Bella Casa, which is now fifteen years old. Codanti buys from 228 vendors, offering furniture, accessories, lighting, Italian ceramics and more that can be purchased and taken home on the same day.

“I actually have a harder time designing my house than anyone else's,” he says. “I like so many pieces that when I go to market I can't commit.”

Codanti lives in a waterfront condo with his nine-year-old Cavalier King Charles Spaniel named Redford – the dog appears in all of Bella Casa's advertisements and is usually curled up in a bed in the back of the store. Codanti's style is old meets new; he likes the juxtaposition of traditional and contemporary.

His taste has evolved a lot. He admits his taste as a teenager was rather “gay.”

“I had more crystal than some would have,” he says.

At 13, he had a vast collection of decanters. Yes, at 13.

“Hey, it was Europe, let's just say,” he laughs.

Continues on Pg. 28

Aaron Spencer, a regular contributor to *Just Out*, is a professional writer and editor. Reach him at aaron@JustOut.com

Photos Horace Long

Bella Casa owner and interior designer Richard Codanti.

