

COLORADO HOMES

& LIFESTYLES[®]

AUGUST 2018



The Mountain Issue

+ *Queer Eye*
Design Guy
Bobby Berk

FIVE
UNDER
FORTY

Early
Risers

Introducing the 2018 class of Five Under 40 winners, a talented-beyond-their-years crew who are paving the way for the future of Colorado design

STORY BY NORMAN KOLPAS
PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY BY JENNIFER OLSON



Left to right:
Megan Moore,
Chris Awadalla,
Chris Turner, Kristen
Thomas and
Matthew Smith;
photographed at
Punch Bowl Social
in Stapleton. »

**FIVE
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KRISTEN THOMAS grew up with an insider's understanding of the value of great interior design. "My dad flipped homes, though back then you weren't known as a flipper," she says. "I'd spend a lot of time with him, going to houses for sale or to Ace Hardware for supplies." Her mom, meanwhile, was in real estate and instilled in Thomas the importance of working hard. "I learned my hustle from her. She taught me persistence, never giving up, because there's no such thing as 'can't happen'—it's just a matter of how you're going to make it happen." Thus inspired, Thomas earned her real-estate license right after

graduating from high school in Orem, Utah, and soon was working as a sales associate with a local contractor. Thomas, the mother of two, eventually moved to Denver with her family and studied interior design at Arapahoe Community College, founding Studio Thomas in January 2013. Today, with eight employees—including herself as principal, four other designers and an architect—she thinks of the firm as "a team, with each of us feeling good about and empowered in our own talents and qualities. We're all very encouraging to each other, and the energy is awesome."



"We want the homes we design to be representative of HOW OUR CLIENTS LIVE THEIR LIVES, to make them feel very good about themselves and elevate their lifestyles." — KRISTEN THOMAS

**Kristen Thomas
INTERIOR DESIGNER**

STUDIO THOMAS
STUDIO-THOMAS.COM



Right and opposite, right: A Lone Tree bachelor pad.
Opposite, left: A vignette from a modern remodel in Lone Tree.

DAVID PATTERSON

A WELL-TAILORED LOOK: "When I was in high school, I wanted to be a fashion designer, and our work at Studio Thomas is influenced by tailored fashion. My team and I do follow a lot of fashion today, and we bring it up a lot in our Instagram feed. Sometimes a client will show me an outfit they love and say, 'This is how I want my home to feel.'"

SURPRISINGLY PERSONAL TOUCHES: "In our intake process, we really focus on our clients' lifestyle—where they like to shop, what movies they love, where they travel, what inspires them. Then we might surprise them by putting books about places they love or their favorite designers on the coffee table, or photos of the church where they got married, in a style we know they like. For a client who played for the Broncos, we framed a piece of art with his number in it by the bedside table. We always include surprises that have a deeper meaning for our clients."

FIVE-BY-FIVE APPROACH: "We divide the design of any room or home into five layers. First is interior architecture, which sets the background. Then we focus on foundation furniture like big sofas and credenzas, and the traffic patterns they create. Next comes accent furniture, including coffee tables, side tables and lamps. After that are accessories—art, coffee-table books, throws and other objects that say as much as possible about the people who live there. Finally, we bring in life in the form of trees, plants, fresh flowers or anything else that smells pretty. Across every layer, we

also make sure to include five elements: wood, metal, glass or something else reflective, overall contrasting textures, and again life. With that mix of materials, you feel an energy almost like the effects of feng shui."

THANKS, DAD: "My dad was the kind of person who could make anybody feel awesome about themselves. On November 15, 17 years ago, he passed away at the age of 50, and in tribute to him, on that date this year we'll launch a new brand called K.Thom, with products including beautiful pillows and throws and nice, big leather trays. The K.Thom philosophy is all based on very simple but intentional living, with a layered look. I want to make each day one of renewal and happiness and elevated living—all the things my dad taught me growing up."

THE MARY POPPINS EFFECT: "I watched Mary over and over again as a kid. Mary always did what I try to do in my work: She flew into this crazy, disruptive home; evaluated everyone's lives; put things in order; made them appreciate their lifestyle; brought in all the happiness; and then she left." »

**FIVE
UNDER
FORTY**

Megan Moore
INTERIOR DESIGNER

DADO DESIGN
DADO.DESIGN



INTERIOR DESIGNERS don't generally think of their work in cinematic terms, let alone bring to it a degree in film studies, as Megan Moore does. "When I started at University of Colorado Boulder, my dad told me to just study something I liked," explains the fourth-generation Denver native. "A film degree teaches you to take something apart and put it back together, to think critically and analytically." Moore graduated in 2002, and her career path unspooled from there, first with a move to San Francisco, where she landed a job in finance. But, yearning for "something creative," she eventually returned home and earned a degree in interior design in 2010 from The Art Institute of Colorado.

She founded Dado Design that same year. Moore keeps things streamlined, with the firm consisting of Moore, a project manager and a junior designer, plus regular contractors. That enables her to stay reassuringly hands-on throughout a project. "What many people don't realize about interior design is it's actually a very emotional process. Whether it's excitement, fear or stress, if we really pay attention to how our clients feel, we can make the process smoother for them and for us." Sort of like the pleasure of watching an expertly made movie.

COLOR VS. TEXTURE: "In general, I don't use a lot of bright color in a design, because I don't like how it feels in a space. It visually accosts you every time you walk in. So, to create interest, I'll layer textures for spaces that have some depth and complexity but are subtle. Texture literally affects how a space feels—it's a tactile element. Imagine when you put your head down on a pillowcase that is soft and inviting. You feel comfortable."

DAVID LAJIER



"The best clients are the ones who say, 'HEY, LET'S TRY TO DO SOMETHING PROGRESSIVE,' who really want to explore and be creative." — MEGAN MOORE



JC BUCK (2)

THE AGONY AND THE ECSTASY: "When I was working in finance in San Francisco, I was questioning whether to stay in this business-y job or leave for a more creative life. One of the consultants who worked there said to me, 'You're looking at creativity as if it's not serious. But what would the world be like without the Sistine Chapel or the *Mona Lisa* or the Eiffel Tower?' I realized that of course there is a place for creativity. That was a breakthrough that led me to become a designer."

ORNAMENTAL PET PEEVE: "One of my pet peeves is that many people don't know the difference between design and decoration. Decoration is part of design, like the icing on the cake, and is only concerned with how things look. Design is how something is going to work, function and feel, as well as how it's going to look."

Decoration is putting ornaments on the Christmas tree. Design is the tree itself."

PHYSICAL PURSUITS: "I recently picked up snowboarding, which I've discovered is a very good way to teach myself that patience is a virtue. There's a nice humility that comes from not taking yourself so seriously; it's a good balance to work, where we're inundated with the idea that we have to be on point, perfect, all of the time. I'm also a basketball junkie and watch a lot of it. Sadly, I'm a Nuggets fan. But I swear, one of these days we're gonna get there!" »

Opposite: A Denver family home. **This page, from top:** A downtown Denver loft renovation. A Cherry Creek condo.



Matthew
Smith
ARCHITECT

CCY ARCHITECTS
CCYARCHITECTS.COM



"I FEEL REALLY BLESSED to have a career that not only fulfills me professionally, but also that I practice in the outdoor places I'm personally passionate about."
— MATTHEW SMITH

A \$100 PARKING TICKET on a hot, humid day in Washington, D.C., was the last straw that led Matthew Smith to head for Colorado. It was the summer of 2005, and he was working at his first professional job after completing bachelor's and master's degrees in architecture at The Catholic University of America. But the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, native loved the outdoors, and a recent trip climbing the Grand Tetons with his dad had given him his "first real taste of the rugged Rocky Mountain West," he says. "And I thought, 'wouldn't it be nice if I could work out there?'" That fall, he interviewed at CCY Architects in Basalt, half an hour northwest of Aspen, and joined the team the following February.

Smith soon made his mark on the well-established, award-winning firm, renowned for its collaborative approach to designing contemporary homes and public and commercial projects. He also rose to the ranks of CCY's leadership team, to which he was promoted last year, and he played a central role in incorporating computer-aided BIM (building-information modeling) technology into their process. "We're now using virtual reality to get inside our buildings as we design them," he adds. Yet, Smith still relishes most of all the hands-on craft of architecture. "Creating something out of nothing, that people get to inhabit and use and enjoy, is pretty powerful!"

Right and opposite, bottom: The T.A.G. residence in Aspen. **Opposite, top:** The inviting terrace of a Castle Creek residence in Aspen.



JC BUCK



JC BUCK [2]

PRESSING PAUSE: "Working with my hands is important to me, helping me think about how things are built or come together. Three summers ago, I took a weeklong immersion course in furniture-making at Anderson Ranch, an incredible facility in Snowmass Village dedicated to the fine arts. Working 9 a.m. to midnight for a week, while my wife let me avoid helping out with the kids, I designed and built a foyer display table made of ash for our house. Consistent with the work I'm drawn to, it's simple in form but complex in details. If I weren't an architect, I'd be designing and building furniture."

THE RETRO APPROACH: "While technology and sexy computer renderings are becoming commonplace, and I've helped lead the charge of bringing that technology into the firm, I still need a pencil in my hand—I think best, create best, analyze best when I use my hands."

THE LONG HAUL: "Architecture is such a tough career for so many reasons. As the saying goes, 'it's an old man's career.' Getting out of school, you're not

going to be making a ton of money. My father, who worked his whole life as a law librarian for the State of Pennsylvania, told me to be patient with the process, to persevere. It takes time to build a practice, and you're working long hours. But you have a professional degree."

THE IDEAL CLIENT: "Any client who's passionate about what you're doing with them is a great client. I like a client who is clearly interested in rolling up their sleeves with you through the whole process, helping shape the project, creating rules and boundaries. It's fun to get someone who's willing to let you push their comfort level a little bit, who becomes an integral part of a collaborative team that prides itself in creating the work with them."

HOW HIS GARDEN GROWS: "I built a raised vegetable garden in our back yard. I like being outside with my wife, Beth, and our two young sons, Avery and River, growing our own vegetables. This summer, we'll have cherry tomatoes, spinach, snap peas, carrots and peppers. We're big on the salads in our family." »

**FIVE
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Chris Turner
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

ELEVATE BY DESIGN
EBDSTUDIOS.COM

IN A WORLD where so many people who embark on any home-improvement project find themselves bewildered by construction schedules and cost overruns, Elevate By Design's co-founder Chris Turner and his business partner Paul Wrona take a revolutionary approach to creating outdoor living spaces. "It's completely transparent," says Turner. "We listen to our clients and how they want to use the space. Then we do the design work. At that point, we choose two or three of the best-suited contractors from a pool of about a dozen we work with and send them a package for bidding." When the bids come in, they comb through and negotiate pricing before handing the options over to the homeowner to select and contract directly with the one they prefer. If the client wishes, he adds, "we can also provide

construction administration for the duration of the project." Turner and Wrona worked together at Designs By Sundown before founding Denver-based Elevate in October 2012. "To go back to a client and see kids swimming in the pool and the husband at the grill, you know that what you do is going to impact the children who grow up there and make the family's lives better and more fun. That's priceless."

WISE COUNSEL: "My very first day of college, I met with my counselor, who asked me, 'What do you love?' I said, 'I love art. I love golf. I love sports.' And she said, 'Have you ever heard of landscape architecture?' At first, I thought I wanted to be a golf-course architect, but I eventually became a landscape-design major. I also learned



a lot about business and always knew I wanted to have my own company."

IT'S ALL ABOUT HUSTLE: "In high school, I played on the basketball, football and baseball teams, and spent a year on the track team. I still play in a men's basketball league on Monday nights. But at 5 feet 9 inches, I was never the tallest guy on the team, so I was always the first one in the gym and the last one to leave. My parents pushed me to be a good listener and mindful of others, and to work hard. I always worked harder than the other guys and that carried over into my business."

SUCCESS BY INTENTION: "My parents also taught me to visualize success, whether getting a hit in baseball or making shots in basketball. I still use visualization like crazy. I write down my goals every year, both personal and business, because writing it down makes it real. Finally, I attribute a majority of my success to my wife, Raquel, who owns a beauty boutique, and our 3½-year-old daughter, Charlie; and we've got another child on the way this December. They're my biggest cheerleaders of all time."

LA DOLCE VITA: "After Raquel and I got married, we went on a 17-day trip to Italy, where my mother's family originally emigrated from. Seeing how all the people there just love outdoor living, love food and love life was a total epiphany for me. I completely soaked it in. I came back and said to Paul Wrona, 'I'm ready.' I quit my job, and we started Elevate a few months later."



INTRODUCING NISHO: "In 2016, Paul and I went on a trip to Modernism Week in Palm Springs. We were inspired by the Midcentury Modern design and began asking ourselves what one thing we could bring to our industry. Almost everyone wants a fire feature in their outdoor spaces, but 95 percent of the time we would have to design

custom pieces because nothing out there was really nicely designed or well put together. We began sketching on the plane home, and that was the start of our new business, Nisho. Our sculptural fireplaces look good whether they're off or on, and they have special burners with really good, big flames—120 to 190 BTUs." »

"We're not just planting a front yard. We design **EXTENSIONS OF PEOPLE'S HOMES AND LIVES.**"
— CHRIS TURNER



Right: A Nisho fire pit.
Opposite, from top: A lap pool designed for a Denver Country Club home. An Observatory Park landscape.

TREVOR BROWN

TOP: MARK WOOLCOTT

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Chris Awadalla
KITCHEN/BATH DESIGNER

SANCTUARY KITCHEN + BATH DESIGN
SANCTUARYKITCHENDESIGN.COM

CLIENTS WHO HIRE Chris Awadalla, principal of Sanctuary Kitchen + Bath Design in Denver, may well breathe sighs of relief upon realizing they're placing their trust in a man who has done it all when it comes to kitchens and baths. "I've built and installed cabinets," he says, beginning his impressive litany of experience. "I've framed kitchens. I've plumbed sinks. I've wired electrical. I understand how a design comes together, so what we put on paper is actually achievable in the real world. Our installations go very smoothly, because they're drawn correctly."

What Awadalla might not always add is that, after graduating from Syracuse University in 2001 with a degree in information management and technology, he also worked some four years for Dreyfus mutual funds. But, realizing that his "need for visual gratification when a job is complete" wasn't being fulfilled, he quit the investment world and apprenticed

himself to a master carpenter in Westport, Connecticut, who manufactured cabinets and performed installations for respected interior designer Beverly Ellsley. "I strapped on a tool belt and instantly became happier." His career contentment multiplied with a move to Colorado in 2009 and then again when he launched his own company in April 2014. "I love the license to be as creative as I can be," says Awadalla. "Somebody's paying me to come up with beautiful, functional ideas for them. That's pretty cool."

THE MOVE WEST: "My wife, Sharon, and I were 29 or 30, with no family in the northeast apart from my sister in Albany, and neither of us particularly wanted to raise kids in New York City. I had learned to ski in the Cascades during high school in Richland, Washington, and we both loved the idea of being near the mountains and having

"What sets me apart is I'm **COMFORTABLE WITH MANY DIFFERENT STYLES.** We'll design everything from classic looks, like traditional white or stained cabinets, to ultramodern kitchens or baths with minimal details." — CHRIS AWADALLA

wider vistas. So we said, 'Let's give Colorado a shot!' We moved to Denver, and I got a job as a kitchen and bath designer with Interior Intuitions in Cherry Creek."

ADVICE FROM DAD: "My dad is from Cairo, Egypt. He came here in 1970, earned a Ph.D. from Duke and worked as an engineer. When I told him I was starting my own company, he said, 'Remember: Your clients are your lifeblood. Take care of your clients.' I really do try to do that, to the point that I'm picking out everything that goes into a space, from the floors to the lighting, the paint colors, the tile, the cabinets, the plumbing."

ARCHITECTURE AFICIONADO: "I love traveling, and I love good architecture. For example, my wife and I were in Boston for a wedding at the landmark Fairmont Copley Plaza hotel, which



opened in 1912, and I spent a whole afternoon just walking around the building, amazed at the architecture. When we go to New York, I love how varied it is, with 150-year-old brownstones next to sleek glass skyscrapers. In Denver, I'm more into the neighborhoods and residential architecture. When I go into a house, I'll spend some time looking at the exterior before I walk in the front door, thinking about what the original architect would have imagined."

GUY NEXT DOOR: "If you met me at a dinner party, I don't think you would immediately think, 'oh, he's a designer'—though that's literally all I have done for the past 16 years. I'm a pretty approachable, down-to-earth, regular guy who happens to be really good at designing kitchens and baths. And I'm really passionate about it." ❖

Above: A Boulder kitchen with a mix of walnut and zebra woods. **Right:** A butcher-block island anchors a Ken Caryl kitchen.

