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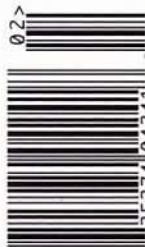
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Best 2009 the city

Houston

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We can't report what the price of oil is going to do. But here's something we can say: No matter what, Houston is still pulsing with hot fashion and culture, fab food, hip home style and particularly provocative nightlife. And it's all here, in our annual "Best" issue, dedicated to what's next! Need to know which restaurants to hit? (Hint: Tony's is still terrific, and popular chef Bryan Caswell is at it again at Little Big's.) Wonder which bands and DJs the cool kids will be buzzing about? Read on. Plus: great gala gowns, accessories for dapper dudes and—shhh—sexy lingerie. The future has arrived. Go on, turn the page...

Trend Du Jour

Some of the city's best in the biz dish on the fab fads for '09!

If It Ain't Baroque "A trend I've noticed is mixing a baroque piece with a modern element—that's really big in Houston," says **Brent Groves**, a studio account exec at Design Within Reach, which specializes in contemporary. "A lot of my clients come to me because we carry all the Mid-Century iconic pieces like the Womb Chair, the Eames lounge and ottoman, and Barcelona chair and stool by Mies van der Rohe."



Traditional elements mix well with mod, says DWR's Groves.

Think Small "We're doing a lot of new designs that are a little smaller but with nicer materials," says prolific, über-modern architect **Allen Bianchi**. "While new green technologies like solar power are not always within the budget of new buyers, a smaller, open, well-organized floor plan can be a fast and easy way to reduce energy and material consumption for new buildings. With the proper scale, light, and a strong connection to the outdoors, a building can feel larger than it really is."

Take A Bath "In a down economy, people are traveling to exotic places less, but they will spend money on a bathroom comparable to a top spa or resort hotel," explains designer **Tom Harper**. "Clients want top-of-the-line dry and wet saunas, massage rooms and even a yoga space. Lots of sparkling glass tile in serene colors like aqua green and cocoa brown, layered with heaps of white terry cloth towels and robes."

Paint The Town Green Environment-minded paint is not just a feel-good fad, says interior designer **Courtney Hill**. "I personally just did my own daughter's nursery in it. A good brand is Mythic non-toxic paint. Designers have been so nervous about using eco-friendly paint because they think it doesn't go on well. But Mythic has been around for a while and is proving that you can be eco-friendly and have a good product."

"Love is in the air!"

—Shannon Hall on two "very, very popular" coffee-table tomes by upscale publisher Taschen, on sale at his Sloan/Hall shop (2620 Westheimer Rd., 713.942.0202). "The Big Breast Book" and its companion on, um, male anatomy sell for \$60.



Designer Janet Gust in a client's 'cyclamen' pink and chartreuse dining room in Houston

Bold Soul

Over-the-top is no longer under the radar. "Bold, rich colors are strong," says designer Janet Gust. But they weren't three years ago when she began to decorate a 20,000-square-foot home for a Houston couple that bucked neutral palettes and opted for vibrant statement-making shades like hot "cyclamen" pink complemented with vivid chartreuse. "At the time I had to fly to New York to find the exotic fabric colors at the highest design houses," recalls Gust, "because you couldn't find them anyplace else. Now you see homes, boutique hotels and fashion going for the most exciting colors of nature, and I think it's connected to the green movement." Gust is still working on the house (with a formal, multi-table, state-dinner-type dining room that seats 36), and now finds it much easier to nab the wild colors, forecasting that bright hues will rule this spring. *Janet Gust Design Group, 2035 W. Alabama St., 713.524.3300*

FAB 5

Red- and orange-lacquered chairs and side tables

Soft earthy shades like lilac in the bedroom

Lucite trays by Allan Knight at the Decorative Center's Ellouise Abbott showroom

Reclaimed wood

Hemp wallpaper (preferably hand-painted with Indian-inspired designs)



HOME OF THE 'BRAVE'

"When do you stop making art and start making a sound building?," asks Fernando Brave (pronounced *brah-vay*) of Brave Architecture. He aims to do both with the huge Sicardi Gallery breaking ground this spring, following his ballyhooed De Santos Gallery, a 2003 build-out of slick stucco and steel. Near the Menil, Sicardi will be a stark space outfitted with windows and skylights so exhibits can be lit with sunlight. The exterior will be mostly covered in charcoal-colored zinc for waterproofing, one of many touches sure to make Sicardi as solid as it will be chic. "If we do our jobs right," says Brave of architects, "we create structures that capture people's imaginations."

Renderings of Brave's upcoming Sicardi Gallery and, above, De Santos

