

One-of-a-kind items with beautiful lines and an artful quirkiness are a specialty of Dorr's.

# Clean Lines, Strong Designs

DUSTIN DORR BRINGS AN EYE FOR MODERNISM TO HIS WORK WITH OKLAHOMA CITY INTERIORS

BY GEORGE LANG | PHOTOS BY RACHEL MAUCIERI

**WHEN HE WAS** growing up in Oklahoma City, Dustin Dorr frequently visited his mother and stepfather in Palm Springs, California, a desert town whose character is largely defined by its mid-20th century architecture and interior aesthetic. Surrounded by the space-age designs that John Lautner and E. Stewart Williams created for superstar clients like Bob Hope and Frank Sinatra, Dorr discovered his love of curvilinear objects and the disarming simplicity of modernism.



The man himself in his studio. DUSTIN DORR art. object.design, 401 NW 30th St in Oklahoma City

Back in Oklahoma with his father, Dorr learned how to select pieces for use in interior design.

"Growing up, my father was an antiques dealer and into real estate, so we were always fixing up homes, going to auctions, estate sales, garage sales for that matter, truly just picking good things out of these situations," says Dorr, "So, from a very early age, that's where I started putting all of this together."

Both worlds are represented in Dorr's work. In the 1927 Tudor home Dorr shares with his wife, blogger Sarah James, and their two children, the warm traditional architecture is juxtaposed with modernist objets d'art, like a 96-inch white oval table designed in 1957 by Finnish-American architect Eero Saarinen. Dorr incorporates comparatively inexpensive pieces into the home like a Room & Board Modern Architecture Bed, emphasizing smart and simple designs over anything particularly ostentatious.

"I would say there's a common thread through my work, and that's clean lines," he says. "Regardless of style or period, you can look at the work and be like, 'Oh, that's clearly destined to work.' Most importantly to me, that it functions and fits a client."

After living and working for 12 years in the Laguna Beach and Newport Beach areas, where Dorr worked with high-end clients to achieve their design dreams,

Dorr and James moved to Oklahoma City in 2014 and resumed their businesses in a new/old environment, working out of an Art Deco building located at 401 NW 30th Street near the Paseo Arts District. With an extensive portfolio of work, Dorr quickly built a reputation for creating bright, carefully assembled spaces that fit clients' tastes and lifestyles while exposing them to new ideas.

"I mean, the best clients are either repeat clients or referrals from other good clients, you know, just because most importantly it's just trust and respect in this business," he says. "And if you don't have that in a client relationship, it's just, it goes nowhere, quick. So yeah, a big part of it is just having a history as a reference with other clients."

But having an ear for listening to the needs and desires of a client is just as important as having an eye for good design, Dorr says. For instance, when he is working with clients who have young children, he is able to bring empathy and understanding to that project.

Above all, Dorr designs spaces with an eye toward permanence. He wants his projects to have long lives and to bring joy and comfort to his clients for years, and when he brings objects into someone's home or office, his hope is that his clients will build relationships with those pieces, embracing them into their own personal histories.





For Dorr, one of the most crucial skills he's developed is the ability to really listen to his clients, and to view the project through the lens of their needs.

By taking care to do everything right the first time and keeping his rates within reason, Dorr maintains good relations with his clients, finding the careful balance of price and work quality that results in referrals.

"When a client and a designer get sideways, it's often due to overcharging," Dorr says. "I mean, that happens all the time when designers are not upfront with a markup or a fee or whatever it might be. And sometimes, bad work has nothing to do with being honest or dishonest, it's just a lot of designers are out there doing work that shouldn't be done and making decisions that shouldn't be made."

Like almost everyone, Dorr was forced to make adjustments to his work during the COVID-19 pandemic. He currently is working on a project back in Palm Springs, but much of the work on the project was done remotely to minimize travel and exposure. But even when the work must be finished virtually, he is constantly learning from his clients, which he said translates into better designs in the future.

"It's really just feeling out client by client, person by person," Dorr says. "And I feel like ... you know, my wife says this about me all the time: I just have a 'good read.'"

"It's an educational process for me because, in order to make someone's home their own, I've got to just take it all in and kind of assess and digest everything about who we're working for," he says. "I give them what suits them, functions well for them and hopefully is timeless for them." 405H

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