

Dare to Design: Local designer competes for the chance to have his own TV show



Journal Photo by Lauren Carroll

Jerome Scott Miller, who will appear on HGTV's *Design Star* Sunday night, stands in a Walkertown home he designed. The sculpture (left) is displayed in the home.

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By Tim Clodfelter | Journal Reporter

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For the past 12 years, Jerome Scott Miller has been relying on word of mouth for his interior-design business. But he's about to get a lot of exposure on national television.

Miller, who recently turned 40, is a Walkertown native who splits his time between Winston-Salem and Charlotte. He is one of the nine contestants on *Design Star*, a competition series on cable channel HGTV. The show will start its third season at 9 p.m. Sunday and will run through Aug. 3. The winner will get his or her own TV series on HGTV (Channel 69 on Time Warner Cable).

"I got involved because my niece was very adamant that I send in a tape," Miller said.

His niece, Jerita Joyner, is a student at N.C. A&T University. She saw that auditions were being held for a new season, and insisted that her uncle give it a shot.

"She actually filmed it for me, and we sent it in, and voila," Miller said. Out of about 8,000 entries, he was selected as one of nine finalists who are given various design challenges in the show.

"They threw stuff at us every kind of way," he said. "Some of the things you anticipate, but a lot of it was totally unexpected."

He has already filmed most of the series, but the finale -- and the resulting announcement of the winner -- will be broadcast live.

Miller comes from a long line of people in the home-construction business. "My grandfather and all of his sons were general contractors and built homes for a living, so really, it's in my blood," he said.

Miller was an architectural engineering major at N.C. A&T, where he decided his true passion was for home design.

"I've always drawn, I've always played around with colors and made things with my hands," he said.

Miller's design business, Scott Miller Interiors, is a secondary job for now. His day job is as a regional property manager for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system, overseeing 28 sites.

In his design business, he estimates that in the past 12 years he has worked on at least 50 homes, three churches, a retirement center, and two dentists' offices.



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at least 50 homes, three churches, a retirement center, and two dentists' offices. "I've never advertised, it's always been by word of mouth," he said. "People walk into a home and see what I've done, and the next thing I know I'm getting a call. So I've been very lucky, very blessed that way."

Some of his jobs are major projects, but not all.

"You have different levels of what they hire you for," he said. "They may hire you just to do artwork, they may hire you to do window treatments, they may hire you to do a full-fledged, full-blown interior design and concept for the whole house."

One of his most famous clients was NBA star Chris Paul. "I've done people like that, and I've done single people who are just getting started and want to dress up their homes," Miller said. "I'm known to really stretch a budget and make things happen, as well as do just really awesome window treatments and artwork."

He has a lot of fun when he gets free rein, as with a home in Walkertown that he helped design from the beginning of construction through completion.

"It's an open floor plan, not as closed-up as some of the more traditional homes," he said. "The design we settled on is not vastly contemporary, but it's a nice modern interpretation of classic lines. If you root modern elements in traditional bones, it'll be something familiar and timeless and classic, and that's what we were trying to go for in this home."

Some elements, such as a sculpture beside the stairwell, blend in to the overall design so well that it seems the home was built around them. "A lot of it is what I call 'design intervention' — not 'divine intervention,' but 'design,' a lot of happy little accidents that sometimes happen along the way. When I found this piece, knowing that this niche was here in the home, I thought 'perfect!'"

Much of his philosophy of home design revolves around the importance of accessories.

"If you are purchasing things for your home, all the base pieces, try to stick to neutral things and less trendy items," he said. "You can pick something clean and sophisticated and just dress those up with accessories."

"Your accessories are easier to switch out than a couch. You don't want to buy an ugly couch and be stuck looking at for the next 10 years. You need to think about it - 'Will I love this couch five years from now as much as I do today?'"

If he wins the contest, he hopes to do a show blending his interior design skills with his love of architecture. "I'd like to have a show that focuses on educating people on the type of home that they own, when it was built, what was going on in that era, and what influenced the architecture of the time. Give them a flavor, or the essence, and kind of tell people what was happening, then incorporate that into the space we're redoing."

But even if he doesn't win, he said he appreciates the exposure the show will give him.

"You hear people say 'I'm glad to just be nominated,'" he said. "They had 8,000 tapes, and they called little old me from Winston-Salem, North Carolina. That's a good feeling."

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