

Slay Them with Frogs

How Does Scott Corridan Excite His Famous Clients? He Knows How to Tell a Story.

by Tiana Molony

Interior designer Scott Corridan is telling me a story. It goes like this: while putting the finishing touches on Dave and Brady Hannah's home in Truckee, California, he searched for accessories that would make the home feel, well, like a home. "This was a "generational home," meaning it would likely be in the family for a long time and would be a base for family gatherings. It had to feel right for them, strike a nerve, and essentially be perfect. No pressure.

He noticed their grandson, Jeffery, often came up in conversation. "Okay, we've got to do something special for Jeffery," Corridan thought. While sourcing furnishings, he came upon some small bronze frogs and remembered Jeffery's fondness for the frogs in the creek by the house. He purchased a dozen for \$150 and scattered them throughout the home.

During the walkthrough, he, his team, the architects, and the family inadvertently passed by many of his frogs without noticing. When they reached the floating hallway bridge to the primary bedroom, Brady finally spotted one, turned to Corridan, and fervently said, "You."

The team in front of him parted "like the Red Sea," Corridan recalls while touching his palms together and pulling them apart. "Jeffery!" Brady cried out to Corridan through happy tears.

Sure, he sourced a \$90,000 Randolph & Hein dining table for this project, but "what killed it for

them was \$150 bronze frogs," he says. "That's what made it come to life, and that's what I love."

He started Scott Corridan Design Group in 1994, "When I had hair," he recalls. He's calling from Incline Village, Nevada, where he lives and leads an equestrian lifestyle. However, on August 1, he plans to move himself, his family, and the firm to Santa Barbara. "Santa Barbara is home," he says.

He grew up in Riverside, California, in a Republican, Irish-Catholic household. When he came out as gay to his parents at 19—during the middle of the AIDS crisis—they disowned him. "I don't want to make light of it because it was really bad," Corridan says, "but it had all the makings of a sappy, soapy Hallmark movie." They cut him off, forcing him to drop out of USC after two years of studying architecture. "It is my greatest regret in life that I didn't finish."

He didn't want this to define him, so he moved to Santa Barbara, attending City College before transferring to UCSB and working full-time to support himself. He started out as an art history major ("It was so boring and tedious and snotty and shitty, I just hated it."), but eventually earned a degree in environmental studies with a minor in urban planning. Later on, his urban planning education would serve his design ethos: "You're problem solving constantly to create the best environment," Corridan says. "It ended up being really cool. And I think I wasn't smart enough to know that at the time."



photos by Kim Reewson

“I was a young punk,” says Corridan, “and so just being told what to do was not my thing.”

Corridan doesn't view his impressive roster as an indicator of his success, but rather a result of staying true to himself. After all, his motivation to pursue interior design stemmed from a belief that every individual, every client, has their own narrative which should be celebrated. As his website proclaims, “Empower who you are.” When I talk to him, I don't see someone with a sad upbringing. Instead, I see someone who took control of the narrative of his life after spending many years being told to be something that he was not.

He extends the same courtesy to his clients. In the same manner in which I construct words on a page to tell his story, Corridan is purchasing bronze frogs because he understands his clients' stories well enough to recognize the weight those frogs carry.

“I'm not a doctor. I can't do surgery. I'm a designer,” he says. “And so, as a designer, I need to lean in heavily on what I do to tell the story.” When it comes to those final details of a project, he constructs the ending. Closes the chapter. Finishes the book. It's through these details that Corridan's true talents are evident.

It can be a photograph of the family or a sentimental allusion like the bronze frogs. No matter how seemingly infinitesimal, this is how he brings the client forward. This is precisely what takes him from an interior designer to a storyteller.

“It took me a while to understand why I love people's stories more than I care what they buy,” he says. This is why, rounding 55 years old, he's finding it hard to let go. It's intrinsically a part of who he is. What keeps him going is the storytelling. Or perhaps, the effect of his storytelling. “What keeps me coming back are the happy tears.”



photo by Kim Reardon



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Corridan's first stabs at interior design started in his twenties with coffee houses, cafes, and some retail stores. He completed his first independent project for Santa Barbara Roasting Company, where he previously worked as a barista. Then a flower shop in Montecito's Upper Village. The gigs were great, he says, but he wanted more. In his words, he was "a punky 23-year-old who wanted to prove himself."

And boy, did he.

Corridan dove into the world of event planning—birthday parties, weddings, and fundraisers—completing nine Dream Foundation luncheons; made appearances on various television shows—*The Tyra Banks Show*, *Extreme Makeover: Wedding Edition*, and *Say Yes to the Dress*, to name a few; and launched a successful wedding dress brand aptly named White Chocolate Label.

He rode this high for 27 years, but as much as he wanted to stay, it came time for a change. He had an epiphany: "You just begin to realize as a bald-headed middle-aged gay guy, like, you're really losing cred with the brides, so I thought, well, it's time to go back to interior design." Interior design it was, but through "hard work and great referrals," he was able to level up and take his talents to the grandest of estates, Mark Zuckerberg's house in Tahoe among them.



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