

PEACH PATROL

LAURA WALKER BAIRD

Going Green With Global Home Furnishings

From a thriving interior-design business and Peachtree Hills antique store to a recurring spot on TBS' *Movie & a Makeover*, Laura Walker Baird's sharp business acumen and unique sense of style have been a formula for success. Now, along with her husband, Paul, and friend, Kent Schneider, Baird is going global. Her new Westside shop, Verde Home, which she co-owns with them, provides an international array of home furnishings that delivers maximum beauty with minimal environmental impact. You'll find South American and local hardwood furniture, organic upholstery, Southeast Asian accessories and, of course, Laura's signature European antique treasures. "We divide the space into distinctive vignettes to show clients how it can all work together," she says. That includes items such as 18th-century Italian chairs reupholstered in Vietnamese fabric and accented with hand-painted pillows made from reused cassette tape. "In addition to furniture, a major focus will be on hand-woven custom carpets from Nepal and Tibet," she says. Verde Home's smart approach is sure to appeal to Atlanta's upscale urbanites.

—Drew Brown

JUST THE FACTS

What sets Verde Home apart from its competitors? "I think there is less continuity in our product offerings and much broader categories. You don't often see reclaimed teak furniture alongside 18th-century antiques."

Who is your ideal client? "Someone educated and well-traveled who's interested in other places and cultures."

What was the appeal of the Westside? "A big part of our target market is the younger generation of professionals who are gravitating to this part of town. It was just a natural fit."

Are consumers demanding more eco-friendly home furnishings these days? "Ultimately, clients want something that looks good. But once we educate them about what we offer and what's out there, they get really excited."

What makes your furniture "sustainable"? "Most of our furniture is made from Peruvian hardwood that comes from managed forests, so there is no forest depletion. It's then stained to look like the traditional woods that consumers desire."

Since many people associate you with Italian antiques, would you say you have redefined your look? "Not at all. I've always advocated a very international, varied style, but pulled together in a way that's cohesive."



HANGES

THE WESTERN FRONT

An influx of creative businesses and daring new residents make the **Westside** one of Atlanta's hottest—and coolest—frontiers

BY JONATHAN LERNER PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERICA GEORGE DINES

Howell Mill Road, between downtown and I-75, is the main drag of an area that's not easy to define. It's too spread out and disconnected to be called a neighborhood. Anyway, it already includes two bungalow neighborhoods, Howell Station and Berkeley Park, plus a shabby, amorphous old community known as Blandtown—in addition to its warehouses and salvage yards, kudzu-choked acres and nodes of fashionable redevelopment. The area's name is uncertain, too. Some now call it West Intown, some say town West and others (including me) prefer to it simply as the Westside. If the naming issue were settled, where does the Westside actually begin and end? Let's say its borders run from I-75 on the north and Northside Avenue on the east. The other boundaries are sketchier, but extend at least to Marietta Street on the south and Atlanta Boulevard on the west. It's crisscrossed through by railroad rights-of-way, some furnished with less-than-adequate roads and discontinuous sidewalks—and suffers perhaps from a collective personality disorder. Whether and how this part of town can ever be successfully knit together remains unclear. In fact, there's only one thing absolutely certain about the Westside: The place is buzzing with energy and growing fast.

The renaissance dates back to the early 1990s, when King Shaw began the renovation of his family's historic plow factory on Marietta Street into lofts for artists and their creatives. Its transformation into the King Plow Arts Center was a brilliant, ward-winning, example of the adaptive reuse of an industrial space. The artists have mostly moved on now, but the complex is still home to Actor's Express, Food Studio, Paul Mitchell The School, several function spaces and dozens

of creative firms. Perhaps because of its isolated location, however, King Plow did not immediately spark much adjacent redevelopment.

Meanwhile, the area around Howell Mill and Huff roads had become home to several businesses catering to the interior-design trade. In 1999, Michael Phillip and Kathleen Walker turned a complex of buildings at that key intersection into showroom and restaurant spaces. Bacchanalia, arguably the city's most sophisticated restaurant, surprised the world by moving there from Buckhead. An unstoppable momentum was generated.

All this was taking place in the context of the phenomenal rebirth of interest in

central Atlanta, a trend accelerating ever since the 1996 Olympics, which has created a burgeoning market for in-town housing. The Westside was not the first focus for new residential construction, but it's definitely on developers' agendas now. Since 2003, some 1,300 units have been built in the district (as we're defining it here), according to Matthew Levin of Sperry Van Ness realty; nearly 2,000 more are slated for construction by 2008, and at least that many again within the following few years. Perhaps in reaction to the current in-town condominium glut, most of these will be rental units. Thus their occupants are likely to be younger and less affluent than the clientele from elsewhere who come to the high-end boutiques and showrooms. Another growing presence is the people who work at the numerous



Regeneration. An interior courtyard at the King Plow Arts Center.

ous advertising, architecture, film and design studios that continue to locate on the Westside. A demographically mixed—and in that sense authentically urban—scene is the likely result. The reurbanization will speed up when the Beltline transit system is built, since it passes through the Westside.

The epicenter of development right now is at the intersection of Howell Mill Road and Marietta Street, where Richard Martin has a master plan for his 13 acres. Eventually, he'll add a mid-rise residential component, but now his renovation of



in chic. The Atlanta Peach-sponsored launch party for Verde Home, which, along with Kiang Gallery, is among the newest tenants at The Brickworks. The Five Seasons brewery opens this spring.

ouses into a retail and loft-office complex called The Brickworks is nearing completion. It is already home to Toscano & Sons, an Italian market, Luxe Atlanta, a fashion boutique, and two shops specializing in recycled and sustainably produced furnishings, Verde Home and Waldenour. Kiang Gallery moved there recently, joining early tenant Sandler Hudson Gallery. A branch of Five Seasons Brewing, the Springs organic brewery and gastropub, is coming soon. The Brickworks is adjacent to the recently built M Street apartment-and-office complex. Ample 15-foot sidewalks front all of the buildings—a tantalizing suggestion, along with the ongoing revival of Marietta Street further east, of a viable pedestrian route into downtown. The next focus of redevelopment activity, already under way, is where 14th Street dead-ends into Howell Street. Here, Chris Faussemagne and Mike Millett, from Weaver & Woodberry Real Estate, are transforming the huge White Provision warehouse. It will become a mix of shops and boutiques, incorporating several new mixed retail/residential units, arranged in a way that promises a pedestrian-friendly welcome. Just next door is the new location of retrmodern.com, which moved along with its Alessi and Kartell boutiques from Peachtree Street. Both the Brickworks and White Provision projects involve sensitive renovation of historic industrial buildings, a consistency in Westside redevelopment. But much of the district's building stock is neither historic nor distinguished, and there are many patches of virtually empty space. Perhaps this accounts for the absence of tricked-up historicism and the many lessons of bold modernism in both new projects and adaptations. It's what you

“An authentically urban scene is the likely result.”

might expect from an architecture office, like Menefee + Winer's new one, but also seen in the Carlos and Marguerite Mason clinic, at the Atlanta Humane Society, and even at the Atlanta Union Mission, which occupies an art-deco former industrial building onto which a handsome contemporary addition has been grafted. “I don't like when time and money are spent on architecture as opposed to just throwing something up. I don't like cheap development,” says *Trading Spaces* designer H

Santo Tomas, whose business partner, architect Franz Schneider, built a cluster of striking modernist live-work townhouses amid the bungalows of Berkeley Park. “Building with integrity is important,” she adds, “especially when somebody is juxtaposing something new with historic buildings.”

The aesthetic and urbanistic quality of future redevelopment along Chastain Avenue and Ellsworth Industrial Boulevard is less certain. New zoning there permits mid-rise residential buildings; large-scale complexes will likely resist. Industry is going to disappear from the area “very quickly,” Martin says. “Land is \$1.5 million an acre. Residential developers can pay it, since they can build density.” “That's the fragile element,” Phillips says. “In Atlanta we don't tend to do things that compromise quality in residential multifamily.” He describes himself and developers like Martin Faussemagne and Millett as “stewards...of a place that has authentic qualities,” and points out that so far there is virtually no intrusion of national or chain retail. “We've really taken a curatorial attitude to the kinds of businesses we've nurtured, trying to create a vibe, which is the antithesis of what big development is about.”

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