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Albert Nichols' picks for style and scent

Anh-Minh Le
Updated 9:19 am, Friday, March 14, 2014



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It's not uncommon for creative people to pursue various vocations before carving out the right career. Such is the case with [Albert Nichols](#). Seven years after earning his architecture degree, Nichols launched elizabethW ([www.elizabethw.com](#)), an artisanal perfumery named after his great-grandmother, [Elizabeth Wightman](#).

"As with architecture, I knew there were

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fragrances for the masses but also perfumes that speak to the individual," he explains. Nichols is self-taught when it comes to devising scents. "I combine my design skills developed as an architect with my knowledge as the 'nose' behind elizabethW fragrances to

create our collections."

Since its establishment in 1995, the brand has expanded to include lines for the bath, body and home. "They are clean, simple, elegant and totally original and all crafted in San Francisco," says Nichols. The elizabethW range is stocked at its own San Francisco and Carmel stores, as well as boutiques, spas and resorts worldwide. The two elizabethW shops also carry housewares, accessories and gift items.

While Nichols is responsible for designing the company's products and letterpress packaging, he has also continued to draw on his architectural expertise, as well as innate design sensibility, to tackle interior projects.

"Design is such a passion of mine - as the creative director at elizabethW or as a designer for a private residence, whether it's an elizabethW product, a piece of furniture or a house," says Nichols, who just completed a residential makeover of an old schoolhouse in Sonoma. "It was very much a labor of love, where I got to combine my design skills, apply my own aesthetic vision, and happily bang nails and saw wood!"

The Nichols cheat sheet

On decorating: "Always incorporate a found object in a home. One of my favorite sources is Heritage Salvage in Petaluma. I've used them for various design projects, including an outdoor bathtub - very decadent when the weather is performing - and fabulous, local bay tree wood for organic looking natural shelving in a new kitchen." (www.heritagesalvage.com)

What's brewing: "I love the tea assortment at Dandelion, a truly unique home store in San Francisco. Among its huge range of high-quality, stylish gifts for every budget, they carry a great selection of Mariage Frères teas from France. It's high time for tea time when I'm at Dandelion!" (www.dandelionsf.com)

Shop locally: "Support your small, local hardware store! We've been using Golden City in Russian Hill for almost 20 years. It's not fancy, but I know they have an amazing supply of almost everything I need for my design work and they never cease to surprise me. I've used steel half-inch pipe, elbows and flanges to make industrial, contemporary drapery rods - as well as copper flashing to wrap unsightly ventilation ducts and copper pipe fittings for door hooks, towel racks and drawer pulls. My design life would be a lot harder without them so close by." (www.goldencitybuildingsupply.com)

Great wall: "Bradbury & Bradbury offers exquisite, handcrafted, silkscreened period wallpapers - made locally in the Bay Area (Benicia). They create new designs, but also reproduce historic styles such as Arts and Crafts. I recently decorated a bedroom in a classic San Francisco home built in the 1920s that needed a unique, period touch. The result was a stunning work of art on the walls, rather than old-style wallpaper." (www.bradbury.com)

Secret source: "Tablelegs.com is my favorite source when I need display tables for our elizabethW shops and our design studio, as well as at home. Made in the USA by skilled

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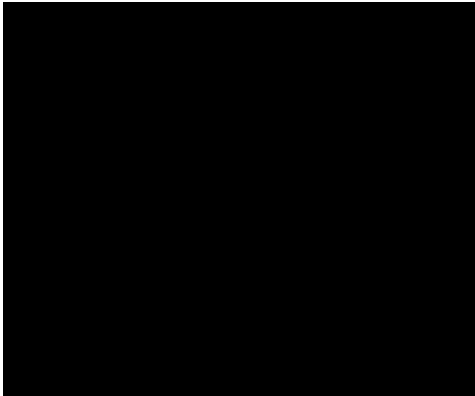
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craftspeople, they can customize any of my designs to my exact needs.." (www.tablelegs.com)

A few favorites

Morihata towels: "These luxuriously soft towels represent the finest in Japanese design. Exceptionally soft, they dry amazingly quickly. I love their Flax Line Organics range, which are lightweight, highly absorbent and green-friendly. Super chic and good for the planet!" (www.morihata.com)

Carmel: "The white-blanket beach at Carmel-by-the-Sea is a must-visit. My family has vacationed in Carmel for generations, so I've always had a soft spot for this easygoing town - especially the magical, cozy beach bonfires at sunset. Opening our second elizabethW store there last summer gives me the perfect excuse to get out of the city and go work and play (in Carmel)."

Vetiver grass: "This tall, dense, wild grass has so many beneficial uses - such as soil conservation, weaving, roofing and green fuel. For me, its essential oils are the foundation for my signature fragrance that I created back in 1995, when I was struggling to establish my perfumery. I love its uniquely fresh, earthy, clean aroma, with light citrus tones and tints of bergamot."

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