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## Wesley Moon



By Sian Ballen & Lesley Hauge  
Photographs by Jeff Hirsch

Designer **Wesley Moon** has come a long way since his early days living in an unheated Mott Street tenement and tending bar to make ends meet while he slaved away at an entry level job at Skidmore, Owings and Merrill—not that he wasn't grateful for the ticket it gave him to come to New York from Atlanta. Designing trading floors is something of a distant memory and now with his own firm growing at a pace, he's already looking for a bigger office space in order to accommodate the larger projects that are coming his way. He's also, we think, quite possibly the only designer we've interviewed who is unfazed by CAD—so those years at the corporate desk paid off in more ways than one.

### Your name is very cool—where does it come from?

I get accused all the time of making it up but it's what I got. Moon is an English name like Keith Moon. I used to hate it growing up. I'm part Cherokee but that's not where the "Moon" comes from. My grandmother was half Cherokee. I get mail from the Korean Society all the time too.

### And we hear that apparently you're really busy—tell us about being busy.

Well my business is just like, going crazy, which is good. I've really been getting a lot of press and new clients and higher tier projects. I've really outgrown my office space so I'm trying to find a bigger space.



In the foyer of Wesley's East Side apartment a photograph by Ross Bleckner hangs above a table designed by Wesley.



A photo by John Dugdale was a gift from a client.



Looking across the living room: a graphic throw from Barneys adds a bit of punch to a mid-century blue velvet "Lady Chair" by Marco Zanuso.



Wesley's mother refinished this console, an eBay find. The head in the middle is a vase by Italian artist Stefania Boemi and represents an ancient Sicilian legend for "Love and Revenge between the Moor and the Maiden". The mirror was custom-made by Alliance Art Glass.





A small brass peacock from India stands atop a marble-top Empire-style side table from a shop on the South Dixie Highway.



Wesley found the quirky 1960s French coffee table from the Marché aux Puces. Wesley's partner, Salvatore Malleo created the religious artwork over the fireplace mantel by printing a digital image on to canvas then applying a glazed strié effect to represent a contemporary interpretation of an Old Master.



A sculptural ceramic accent table in a bronze glaze is positioned next to a 1950s chair covered in rabbit fur.





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**To what do you attribute this increase in growth?**

It's really been ramping up since the start. I've been in business eight-and-a-half years. I started at my dining table and it just seems to be growing exponentially. It's totally word of mouth.

**It's interesting how being published is important but doesn't really lead directly to clients.**

It's really funny. I think I got one client out of thirteen that found me from a magazine. It gives you a little cred. It's a big ego boost.

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A close-up of the rabbit fur covered chair accented with a pillow by Missoni. On the far wall, an Italian mid-century wall unit holds the TV as well as other favorite objects and books.



A Kelly Falzone Inouye watercolor hangs over the sofa.



The other half of the Italian mid-century wall unit. The desk section displays a porcelain vase from Cocobolo Gallery and an antique ivory model of a pagoda that was a gift from a client.





A three-arm Serge Mouille "Spider" lamp is suspended from the living room ceiling.



The comfy blue velvet "Lady Chair" is positioned atop a French Art Deco rug from Doris Leslie Blau.





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**Tell us a little about your background.**

I grew up in Atlanta and my mom when I was growing up was a designer—not a big designer—she was a decorator.

**What would say was the distinction?**

I personally don't have this hang-up but a lot of people think that if you've gone to school and went to an accredited institution, then you are designer. People see decorators as like, a bored housewife. I had a boss once who said that the difference between a designer and decorator is that [being] a designer is considered a vocation and a decorator is considered as [someone who presents] an invoice for \$100,000 and the client is happy to pay it. It's more fantastical, and more dramatic.

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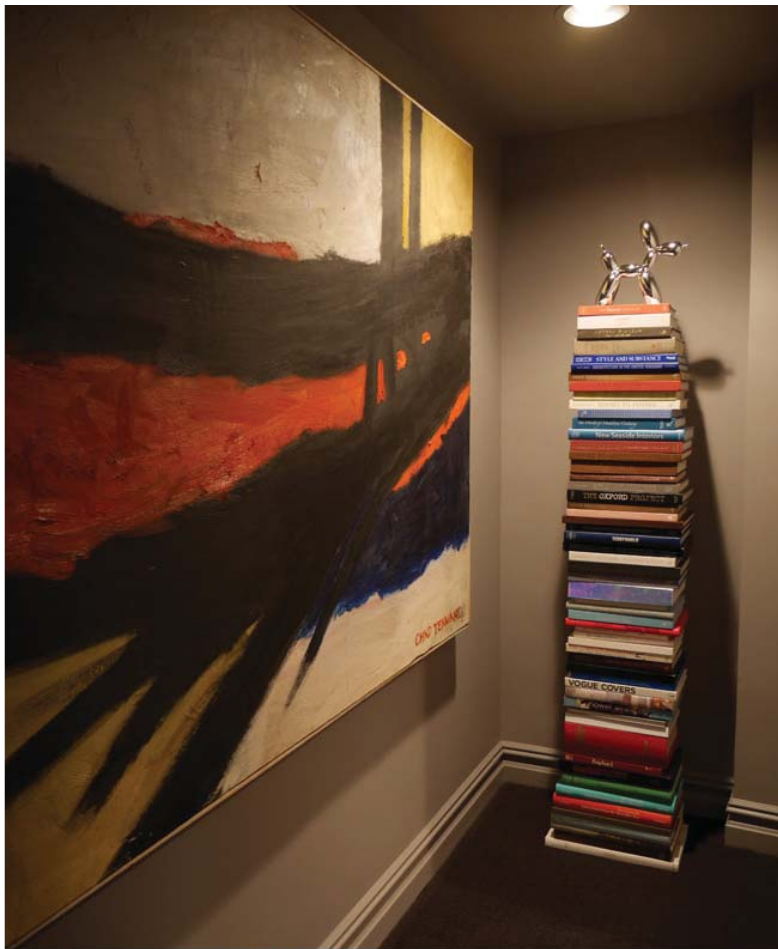


A lava cameo from Paris is given added presence with an ornate Victorian gilt frame found at the Paris Flea Market. The frame was retrofitted by Alliance Art Glass.



At the end of the bedroom hallway a Jeff Koons "Balloon Dog" stands on top of a tower of art and design books.





The large abstract oil painting is by Chad Tennant.



In the study, a color photograph by Judy Friday hangs over a custom sofa bed.



A small Fornasetti stool stands on an area rug from Crate and Barrel.



A vintage chair (one of a pair) found on eBay was cut down and covered in fabric from Glant.





In the powder room, custom-color wallpaper by PaperMills is installed above the original 1929 wall tiles and pedestal sink. The light fixture is from Schoolhouse Electric.

**And how does your taste differ from your mom's taste?**

Completely different. My mom loves bold everything. She'll put print on print. She's working in the south. It's just completely different aesthetic down there. She likes things that are more aged. I've always liked things that are little more clean-lined.

**Did you go to design school in Atlanta?**

I did. I went to Georgia Tech for architecture—I hated it and decided I wanted an interior design degree—so then I was able to get my interior design degree in two years after that from the American Intercontinental University, which sounds like the Sally Struthers Institute for VCR Repair but it was an accredited design program.

For spring break the whole class came up [to New York] and we toured firms. And we toured Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. And in that tour, the man that was giving the tour, I just hit it off with him. I didn't realize he was the head of the interiors program so I wasn't nervous speaking to him and he was like, "You know, when you graduate, please send me your resumé and your portfolio." So I did as soon as I graduated. I came up and they hired me on the spot as a junior designer.

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Peeking into the master bedroom.



A pair of mid-century sconces from the Marché aux Puces flanks a custom bed upholstered in an amethyst-colored Loro Piana cashmere.





A gold leafed ceiling fixture by Catellani & Smith called "Macchina Della Luce" is suspended from the bedroom ceiling. The bright yellow Danish bedside cabinets are from USM.



A well-tended, large cactus dominates a corner of the master bedroom.



A Mazzega table lamp is from John Salibello.



Serious bedtime reading for Sal. (Wesley's side has design magazines and an Ann Rice novel.)





Looking across the comfy amethyst-colored bed. The stripe throw is from ABC Carpet and the rug is from Hakimian.



The other half of the pair of chairs found on eBay stands next to a colorful garden stool by Reinaldo Sanguino from Barneys.



Family photos. A photo of Wesley's grandparents on their honeymoon hangs above one of Sal's parents wedding in Sicily. "I paired these because I love the commentary of how very American my grandparents' photo looks compared to Sal's parents' wedding image," says Wesley.

**Wow. What did that entail?**

Torture.

**Oh. What precisely was the nature of the torture?**

What you end up being is "AutoCAD Operator Number 42." And you work a hundred hours a week and you're working on a little piece of a big project so you never really get to see the whole project. But it got me to New York. And it was really good to have it on my resumé.

**It's still interior design.**

It is ... but you're deciding how many desks you can get on to a Goldman Sachs trading floor. But I made my best friends there. They're still my best friends to this day. Everyone was kind of going through this struggle. It was new to me to be in this corporate environment. It was new to me to be in this giant city. I had no money. I had to bartend on the weekends to make ends meet.



The view of the Queensboro Bridge from Wesley's bedroom.





The master bath. Wesley and Sai's collection of cologne fills a glass shelf above a porcelain pedestal sink. The faucet is from California Faucets and is mounted on the original 1920s pedestal sink. The glass shelf and medicine cabinet are both original to the apartment.



Looking into the dining room from the bedroom hallway. Wesley found the vintage Danish ceiling fixture on 1stdibs.com

### Where did you live?

I lived on Mott Street between Grand and Broome, which was nice but not what it is now. I lived in a second floor back tenement apartment with the tub in the kitchen and no heat. Sometimes in the morning I would open the oven and just leave the door down while I showered because it was right next to it! But I redid that apartment! I faux painted everything and I went to IKEA and I bought discount fabric. I also had some of my grandmother's furniture, which I used. And it actually got me my job at Martha Stewart! Kevin Sharkey told me that when he saw what I did with that apartment, he instantly wanted to hire me.

### Why so?

It wasn't during the interview but he later told me that when he saw that [apartment], he knew I was for them because it was such a DIY [effort] ... you know I'd pulled these tricks out of my hat, which is very Martha Stewart. It's all about being able to do things on your own on a budget in a sensible way.

### And yet, I think you may be the first designer we've interviewed who is proficient at CAD.

Really? It's my thing. I design that way now instead of sketching. I love to draft. I have over my desk—my mom had it framed for me—all these houses that I designed when I was fourteen years old on my drafting table in my room.



A 1970s bar cart from Horseman Antiques on Atlantic Avenue stands in front of a smoked-mirror tile wall that was original to the apartment.





Antique Italian chairs with alligator embossed patent leather seats surround an Edwardian dining table, refinished by Wesley's woodworker.





A table designed by Wesley for a Ronald McDonald House charity vignette and a large rubber plant are reflected in a wall of smoked mirror tiles.



Looking past a table vase by Kelly Behun Studio to a boldly colored lithograph by Alexander Calder.





Ornate antique Italian brass candelabras stand atop a sideboard by Paul Evans. The 1950s perforated metal wall sconces are from the Paris Flea Market in Saint Ouen. The graphic wall sculpture hanging over the sideboard is by Geoffrey Myers.







A ceiling fixture by lighting designer Ingo Maurer seems to float above the dining room table.



An early 70s light sculpture stands between the dining room windows. An early 70s light sculpture stands between the dining room windows.

**What do you think makes you passionate about designing residential rather than say public space?**

I don't know what makes me passionate but I know that my dad says ever since I was three years old, I would say I have to go to the bathroom but I really just wanted to see the house. If I go to someone's house, I find a way to look around! I mean it's not even about the beauty.

**I know what you mean, that curiosity.**

I used to have this obscene obsession with campers and trailers! There was this place called Camper World. My grandmother used to literally drive me there, park in the parking lot and I would go into every single one. And then I would build them with my Legos ... I mean I haven't toured one in a hundred years ...



A bookcase designed by Wesley is filled with color-coordinated books.







The walls of the kitchen vestibule are covered in a wall paper by Kelly Wearstler from Lee Jofa.



Wesley welcomed us with a spread of food including one of Sal's famous frittatas. The photograph is an enlarged copy of "The Cappa Magna", a historic photo of Pope Pius XII during a procession in the 1920s.



**So do you think your interest is more in the structure and less in the people living within, which is my motivation for looking around other people's houses?**

I'm definitely interested in that but that wouldn't have been my original drive. That's something that's developed from interior design.

**I wonder why nice rooms matters to us and they don't necessarily matter so much to other people. People can live happily enough in messy rooms or whatever.**

I think it's DNA. And fluorescent lighting ... anyone who can live with fluorescent lighting isn't normal.

