

Store Corps!

Top L.A. designers venture out into the big, bad world of retail. What are they thinking?

By Alexandria Abramian-Mott | Photography by David Waldorf

Shopping 'til you drop with somebody else's money, playing house with somebody else's house and calling your BlackBerry the office. Who'd give up that gig for minding the shop? The answer: Some of the city's busiest designers. All of a sudden, L.A. decorators are taking the plunge into retail, pulling the surplus chandeliers, armchairs and artwork out of storage and putting them into their very own shops. Here's who's got the goods.



Gary Gibson

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Consider Gibson one of the original decorator-turned-retailers. In 2002, the designer opened a small shop on Beverly Boulevard, selling a mix of his own furniture and accessories that reflected his bent toward all things elegant/organic. More recently, Gibson traded locations with Suss Knit, in the process upgrading his footprint to almost 3,000 square feet. The new, loft-like digs give him the elbow room to expand the offerings to an impressive collection of artists (Jim Britton, Nancy Levy, Atlanta up-and-comer Donald Robson), more objects and more furniture, as well as mirrors and lighting of his own design. And instead of working in the back of the space, Gibson's planted his desk smack in the middle of the shop, where he juggles multiple design projects from L.A., Palm

Springs, Connecticut and Montana. So why in the world would an in-demand designer like Gibson spend his time minding the shop? "It is distracting working out in the open," says Gibson. "But that's actually the point. People walk in here, and I get to talk to them, and they get to see my world: This space is like a three-dimensional portfolio. People really see how I put things together here." And while he has netted new design clients who have stumbled into the store, Gibson says that's more the exception than the rule. Instead, he says, the showroom has become something of a magnet for design junkies, as well as decorators like Michael Berman, Kerry Joyce, Jeffrey Hitchcock and Elizabeth Dinkel. And while he maintains that his retail business only accounts for about 30 percent of Gibson Design profits, as inspiration, he says, it's immeasurable. "This really fulfills a creative outlet for me. This is truly where I go to get inspired."

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SHOP CROP Gary Gibson in his Beverly Boulevard shop and design studios, which he "completely redesigns about once a month."