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Photo by Marci Roe

The Golden Child of Retail

Visual Merchandising Guru
Sean Barnes adds a lovin' spoonful to San Diego shops.

by Carly Harrill

Sean Barnes is not afraid of change. As a matter of fact, change is the underlying explanation, the background music, the disguise behind why each of this design visionary's projects embrace such a different vibe. From the urban-chic Maeve Riley boutique nestled in the quaint neighborhood of South Park to the

gothic sanctuary of Hillcrest's Cathedral candle boutique, his unique niche in visual merchandising and relentless pursuit for perfection have lead to a rather diverse resume. Barnes' own abode even 'redefines' its identity every six months, reluctantly admitting he has owned only two pieces of furniture for more than two

Encinitas-based Mog & Rue, one of Sean's San Diego clients.

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Photo by Marci Roe



Barnes' much-loved Maeva Kiley

Photo by Mike Smith

traffic establishments like Sorella and Rebecca Norman—often for no fee. “I knew what it would take to get my name out there,” Barnes says. But, when working two jobs was no longer realistic, Barnes had to extend his best wishes and see what the world had in store for him. The rest is history, my friends.

Now in its second year, Barnes’ thriving visual design and image modification agency, Visual Lovin’ Spoonful, is building a reputable client base through word-of-mouth, fine-tuning

an identity and spreading its wings. Strongly believing that “if you really love something, you will make it work,” Barnes strives to take what his clients want and optimally work with it to make their vision a reality. “People choose me and I choose them,” says Barnes. “I like to meet with clients for an hour and get to know them, which helps me identify who they are, in turn, producing a product that ‘fits’ them.” Barnes is the poster child for client satisfaction. If they are ultimately happy, he has done his job.

While his projects do indeed vary, there are a few “Sean Barnes” elements that predominantly shine through. “I’m raw,” admits Barnes. “I don’t like anything that looks too put-together and I admire design that is not afraid of unacceptance or failure.” When asked which project most closely identifies with his design approach, Barnes credits Maeve Riley. He also shamelessly, yet modestly, plugs MR as his favorite boutique on a visual plane in San Diego. “Maeve Riley is a diamond in the rough. Amazing people behind it. It was the first project that trusted my instinct and said, ‘Do whatever you want.’” This is essentially why the man who wears his heart on his sleeve, also recognizes his heart resides in San Diego—it’s an untapped market that is willing to test the waters as it sits at the frontier of becoming so much more. “There is a reason I continue to return to San Diego,” says Barnes. “I’ve lived here four times in my life.”

In the coming months, things are only picking up for Barnes. He spends a fair amount of time traveling between the West and East coasts, working diligently on a luxury bath and candle boutique in

NYC called Red Flower and applying his retail mindset to a multi-million dollar home in the Hollywood Hills. In the meantime, Barnes continues to set the bar high looking for the right opportunity to launch his own, multi-faceted destination. “I want to open an intimate department store, five levels with a florist, accessories, housewares and men’s and women’s clothing.” Though time is a luxury for Barnes, he never fails to pay attention to what really matters: his 9-year-old Miniature Dachshund, Dolce Pazzo, and his love for the beach, theatre and opera. He insists he doesn’t watch much television but he will be blunt on one topic, “I’m a huge fan of Project Runway.”

Looks as though life does imitate art.

For information on Sean Barnes and Visual Lovin’ Spoonful, call 619.341.3192 or email seanbar@yahoo.com.