



Tessa Eaton of
Ambiance Interiors
appreciates elegant
simplicity in design.

Tessa Eaton spent part of her childhood in her father's native Denmark, a country practically synonymous with a fresh-and-simple aesthetic. But the interior designer also cites an important early influence in Frank Lloyd Wright — when she was a middle-school student, her godmother gave her a book showcasing the masterpieces of the modern-architecture icon.

Eaton was struck by the way Wright used landscape and line: how he connected his buildings' contours with the natural world. Working for Asheville's Ambiance Interiors, she brings an approach that's equal parts practical and artistic.

Living in Scandinavia no doubt made quite a mark on your design psyche.

Yes — my dad's relatives owned what they called a hardware store, but it was really what we would consider a kitchen-supply store. It had silverware, plates, and everything else one might need to set up a well-equipped and lovely kitchen. I was with my dad at the store early on. We moved back to the States when I was seven, and my

How She Rolls

Designer is influenced by a European childhood — and a powerful Asheville awakening

By Carolyn Comeau
Photo by Rimas Zailskas

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father worked for the Danish furniture company Bova in Atlanta. These experiences made me love Danish design's simplicity, and contributed to the development of my pragmatic design approach.

Why Asheville?

I moved here in 2000 with my daughter and enrolled at UNCA as an art major, thinking about teaching art, but I ended up attending Western Carolina University and getting my training in Interior Design.

Any professional mentors who've dropped knowledge on you along the way?

Hands down, [owner] Kathryn Long and Linda Constable from Ambiance. I've learned so much from them — they've been working as designers as long as I've been alive. I started as an intern there in 2011, and became a paid member of the design staff in 2012; I finished my degree in May of that year.

Besides learning about clients' visions for their spaces, you have an interesting way you interpret their personal style ...

I observe them. A huge clue about a client's preferences is looking at what

they wear — clothing and jewelry say a lot about what people love.

Any other unusual approaches?

I like to incorporate pieces clients love into a space, rather than hiding them away. If you have a platter collection, why not mount it on a wall? It adds lots of impact and is definitely a conversation starter.

What's a current project that's got you excited?

I'm working with Linda on a wonderful new project with Platt Architecture [of Brevard], a home for a retiring university professor with a huge book collection. The library will be the home's centerpiece. The home is Spanish-influenced, so I'll incorporate other things he likes into the spaces, too: rich colors, dark wood, leather pieces.

But practicality is also a stated component of your style. How does that play out in your own home, for example?

A comfy sofa is a must, as are washable slip covers: I have two kids, a husband, and a dog. I'm also sentimental, and have art from friends and personal family pieces. I love blue and have many shades of it incorporated into my home — it's

serene and harmonizes well with lots of other colors.

Besides the blue, how else is your Scandinavian background represented?

I like to mix the old with the new — I'll use Ikea pieces with old Danish family furniture.

And what design tip can you give that acknowledges our local mountain vernacular?

Since we live in this place with so much natural beauty, I'd advise bringing the outside in. Lots of homes we work on have stunning views, and we try to feature it somehow in the interior space, like connecting a deck to the dining room, for example.

You have a hobby that might surprise people ...

I was a member of the Blue Ridge Roller Girls [a competitive roller-derby team] for the last seven years. I loved it — it taught me lots about women's empowerment, and for sure helped me grow in my work.

Tessa Eaton can be reached at Ambiance Interiors (189 E. Chestnut St., Asheville). 828-253-9403. www.ambianceasheville.com.