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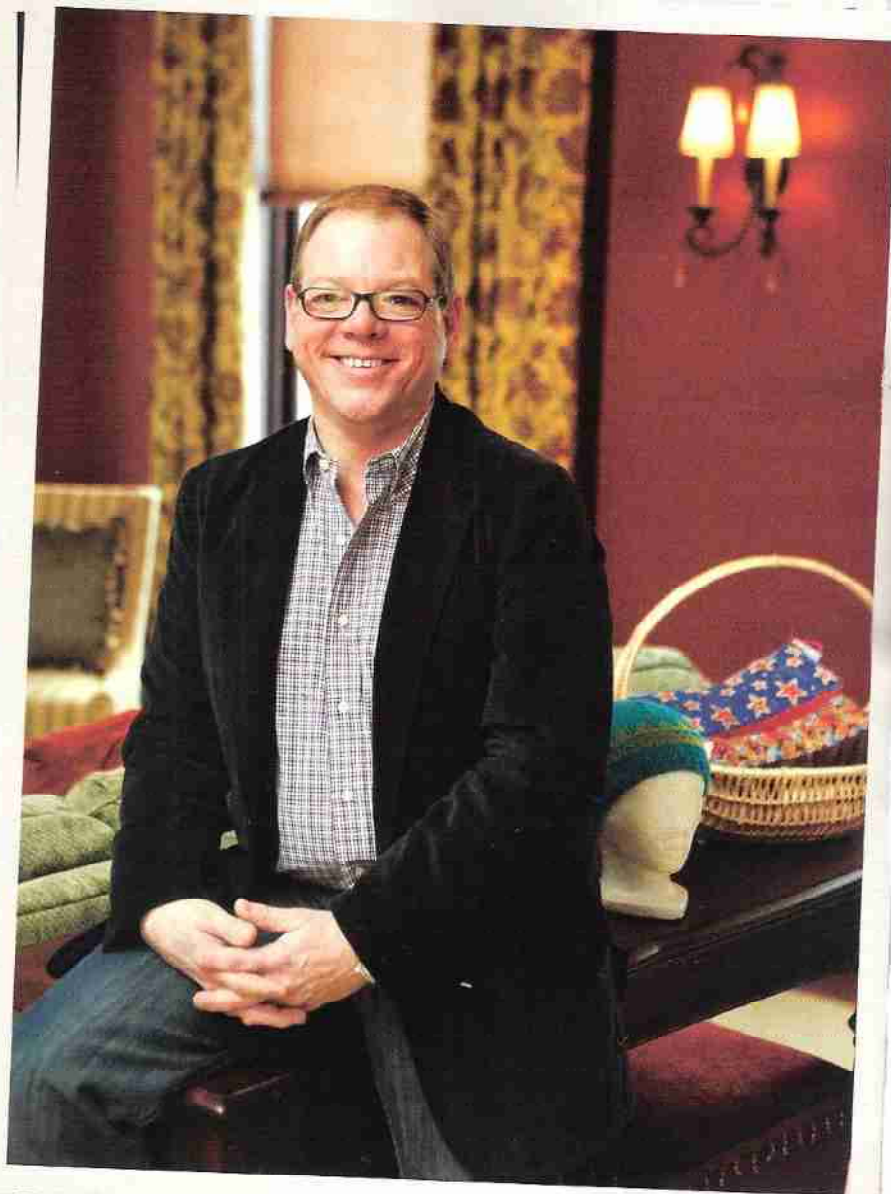
MARK TAYLOR:

The fine line between design and politics

you know that John Lennon line about life being what happens when you're making other plans? Interior Designer Mark Taylor does—at least through experience. As a political science major at Buffalo State College, Taylor had already landed a plum paid internship in Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan's (D-NY) office, and seemed destined to find success in the political arena. But as Lennon hinted, destiny's a funny thing.

It really wasn't much of a stretch that Taylor ended up in the design business; he'd loved art his entire young life, but had never seen a way to make a career of it. Before attending Buff State, he'd attended the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) in New York City for a year. "It was hard for me, coming from a small town like Orchard Park, and going to one of the biggest cities in the world," Taylor recalls. "It wasn't long before I wanted to come home." After leaving FIT, Taylor enrolled at Buff State, where he discovered his knack for politics, and pursued it. He declared a major in political science—but minored in design.

Taylor finished his degree, but ultimately realized that politics wasn't for him; he could never shake the feeling that there was something else he was supposed to be doing. In 1993, he finally took a leap of faith and opened a design shop on Elmwood Avenue. "I just kept coming back to it," he says. "It's like I'm not working in my chosen field; I'm working in the field that chose me." Taylor Gallery (now called Mark Taylor Interiors) was a success, and its owner discovered all the pros and cons of owning one's own business. The good—working in a field he loved and



Taylor is shown in the living room of Gilda's Club on Delaware Avenue, where he is a board member, and part of the design team that decorated the clubhouse.

looking forward to going to work each day—Taylor believes, outweighed any bad, including any worries about succeeding.

Those worries all but evaporated the first time Taylor did a room for the Junior League of Buffalo's Decorators' Show House in 1995, something he's continued to do every two years since. "Honestly, if it weren't for the Junior League, I wouldn't have a career," he maintains. "Twenty thousand people go through those houses every other year. People saw my work, and they started calling me. Even months and years later, people would remember a room I did at a particular Show House, and call me."

Satisfied clients led to referrals, which now comprise a large part of Taylor's business. "Sometimes, if you're lucky, the busi-

Photo by ic.kraft

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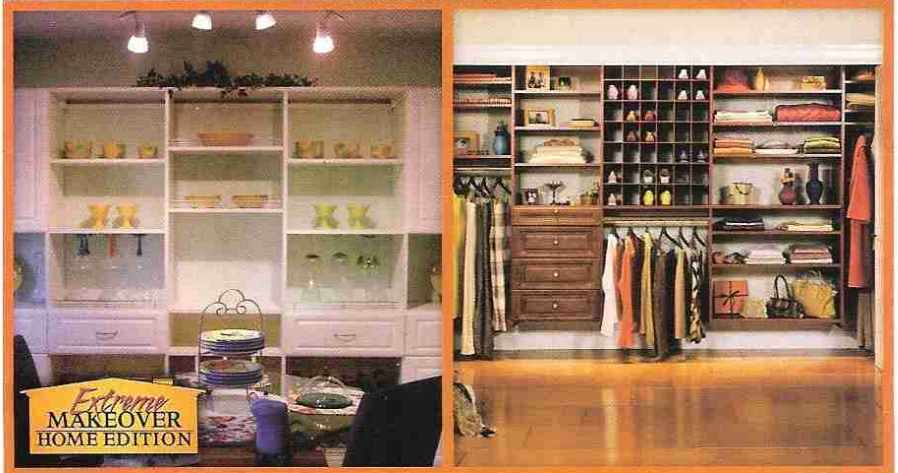
ness takes on a life of its own,” he marvels. Now, clients who trust Taylor and enjoy his work have flown him around the country for jobs as far north as Canada and as far south as Florida. In fact, when—after thirteen years—former Buffalo State College President Muriel Howard left her job to take on the Presidency of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, she called on Mark to decorate her new home in the Washington, D.C. area. “She’s an amazing woman,” Mark says. “It was sad to see her leave town, but it’s great to watch her succeed in other areas.”

If not for the courage of his convictions, Taylor, too, might have ended up in D.C., but one could argue that part of his success is still owed to politics: He has to know how to deal effectively with clients. “You have to remember that you’re imprinting their style, not yours,” says Taylor, who achieves this by sitting down with clients to listen, listen, listen, ask some questions, then listen some more. “I start out with a consultation, we talk about the scope of the project, and I listen to them, and figure out what they want to do. It’s basically just heavy listening, and then I go back to my desk and decipher what we’re doing.”

In the end, Taylor always insists to clients that he didn’t do it by himself. “I want the clients to be ecstatic, and say, ‘This is great; this is exactly what we wanted.’ But I also want them to know that they created it,” he maintains. “I got the fabrics, and worked with the upholsterer, helped them pick out their artwork, and executed it, but we’ve created it together. It’s their house and their space, and they’ve produced it. I just helped.” ■

Terri Parsell Hilmey is a freelance writer and mother of three living in Williams-ville.

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