

LITTLE ROCK
Southern No. 3

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FORM +FUNCTION

The interior design business looks so easy when you watch those 30-minute programs on Home and Garden Television (HGTV). The designers snap their fingers and voila, a completely re-designed room appears.

In reality it's nothing as simple as that. In a competitive market Tobii Fairley has been able to grow her 10-year-old interior design business from herself and one employee to 10 employees, and she has received professional accolades. In March Fairley was honored as one of the Top 20 Young Designers in America by *Traditional Home* magazine, and in April she was named Wilson College of Business Entrepreneur of the Year for 2009 at the University of Arkansas and one of the 40 Under 40 by Arkansas Business Journal.

Armed with a Bachelor of Science in accounting from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, as well as a B.S. in interior design and an MBA from the University of Arkansas, Fairley first worked out of her home in Little Rock in 1999 offering design consulting. But a few months later in January of 2000, she decided to rent a retail space in Benton offering design and retail items. Since most of her clients were from Little Rock, she moved the business to The Ranch area on Highway 10 in 2004.

In 2005, while pregnant with her daughter, Ellison (now 4), Fairley began to feel the need to make priorities. She decided to downsize most of her retail offerings and focus the more on fine art.

"My interior design work has always been the stronghold of my business," she said in a recent interview. "Now I have a thriving fine art gallery that represents 17 artists, very little retail and a nationally recognized design firm with 10 employees."

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Over the years Fairley has not neglected her charitable side. She has served on the board for the Arkansas Repertory Theatre, the consortium board for the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences and the board of directors for Central Bank and has been the chairperson for St. Vincent's IV party for the third year in a row and a sustainer for the Junior League of Little Rock and various other causes.

Recently she announced her own charity, Beautiful Life Foundation, which she plans to launch later in the year. "Interior design is my passion," she says. "I love helping people have a beautiful life!"



Tobi answers the questions you really want to know:

SE: What is your personal decorating style?

TF: Rooted in traditional elements and simple lines but with dramatic color and pattern.

SE: What's hot right now in interior designing?

TF: Everything goes in color these days and really in style, too. It is sort of like in fashion, not much is against the rules any more. It is all about what defines you and your personal style. So help my clients identify things they love and that define them as a family. Technology is amazing, and new things come out every single week with regard to appliances and audio-visuals that are just fantastic. One of my favorite appliances that I have been using for a couple of years now is the microwave drawer. For our spaces, granite is less popular than it was a few years ago, and marble and solid surfaces like quartz have taken its place. I am a less-is-more girl as far as accessories go and the more of them that can be objects of art the better!

SE: As an interior designer what is your favorite home decor accessory you can't get enough of?

TF: Christopher Spinkler lamps! I love them, and I am personal friends with him!

SE: Outside of designing, do you have any hobbies, or do you collect or obsess over anything in particular?

TF: I am absolutely, totally and completely in love with beautiful (and expensive) shoes! They are really my signature style and in the same way that I use a lot of color in my work, I am very colorful about shoes!

SE: If you could be a color, what would it be and why?

TF: If I were a color, I would be pink. Bright pink, not hot, because it is strong and dramatic but at the same time bubbly and feminine!

PLATE

SE: What is your kitchen style?

TF: I am a cook. So I like my kitchen to be clean and functional with great lighting. It is all white or off-white and has great appliances! A gas stove and double ovens are a must!

SE: Fondest memory regarding food?

TF: My brother and I would stay up late and watch *The Tonight Show* in our pajamas, and our great-grandmother would cook bacon and old-fashioned rice with butter and biscuits at 11 or 12 at night.

SE: Favorite cookbook?

TF: *The Five Bluff* cookbook *Southern Accents* from years ago. It's where I got my dumpling recipe and a bunch of others.

SE: What is your 'go-to' snack?

TF: Sushi!

Photo: Tobi Tinsley; styling: aaron spink; hair: joshua andrew and styling; face: if face; shoes: free; hairbrush: the calm.