

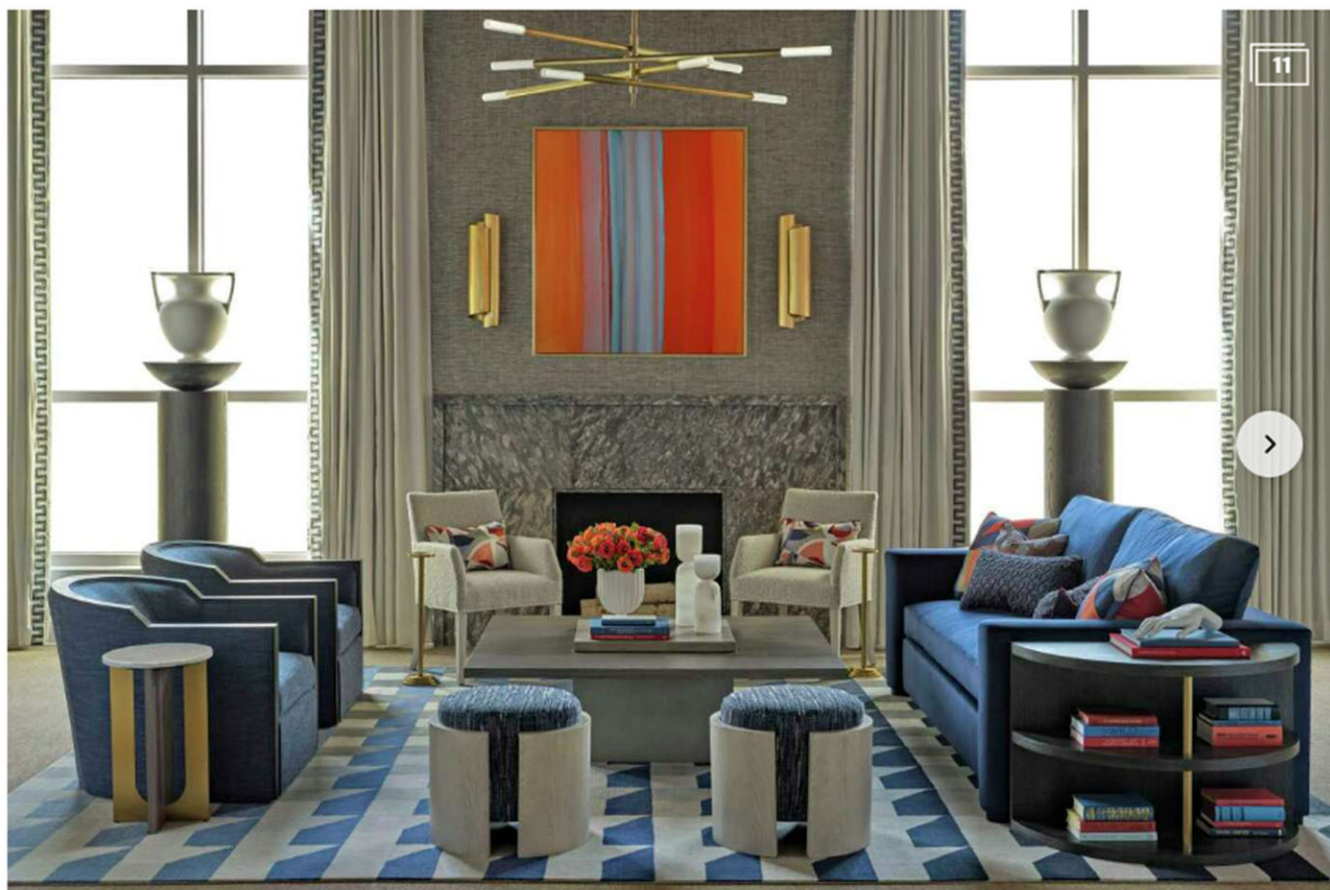
LIFESTYLE // HOME DESIGN

Houston designer with both Texas A&M and UT credentials launches new midcentury furniture collection with Chaddock



Diane Cowen, Staff writer

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1 of 11



Houston interior designer Benjamin Johnston of Benjamin Johnston Design has a new collection of furniture with Chaddock Furniture Workroom. His pieces are modern interpretations of neoclassical forms with midcentury influences. This photo shows a Bruno sofa, Dario dining chair (white), Franco swivel chair (blue), Ugo accent table next to the swivel chairs, 2 Rocco stools, Titus cocktail table in the center, and 2 Dante pedestals. Terzo end table at the end of the sofa.

Diana Parrish

Sofas and chairs in rich hues of blue, mossy green and mulberry sit on patterned rugs with cocktail tables, ottomans, accent tables and chairs, all embellished with decorative cuffs, front-curve arms or handsome strips of wood.

They're impressive showroom vignettes in the [Chaddock Furniture Workroom](#)

showroom at the annual fall market at High Point, N.C., launching [Houston interior designer Benjamin Johnston's](#) impressive 49-piece, whole-home collection that's coordinated with two other new collections of rugs and textiles that he created for Madison Lily Rugs and S. Harris textiles.

They're inspired by neoclassical architectural principles and interpreted with Johnston's more modern aesthetic, heavily influenced by the midcentury-modern work of Italian designer Carlo Scarpa.

Johnston grew up in Missouri City, then studied architecture as an undergrad at Texas A&M University and earned a master's in architecture at the University of Texas at Austin. (He considers himself "Switzerland" when the rivals meet in sporting events.)

While he's worked as an interior designer for two decades, he opened his [Benjamin Johnston Design](#) firm just seven years ago. In the past few years, he tripled his staff to 15 people and expanded his firm's services to include full home design – exteriors and interiors.

In Houston, his Craddock line can be purchased at the trade-only Ladco showroom on Washington Avenue or in the John Brooks retail store in the Decorative Center Houston. Well-received at High Point, the collection caught some early buzz when Business of Home started its "Best Debuts" list with Johnston's collection.

Johnston took time recently to talk about his new collections, Italian inspiration and what comes next.

Q: How did this new collection with Chaddock come about?

A: I am a passionate believer in certain core values. I love furniture companies that are American made. I like to align myself with craftsmen who are building furniture the right way. There were deficiencies in the market, things that I could never find – consistent things that I suggest for clients and then cannot find. Chaddock had been a resource for me for years ... and one day they asked what it would take for me to do more business with them.

I'd told them that I love what they stand for ... but there aren't enough SKUs (the numbers retailers use to differentiate products) for me to pick from. From that came the notion that I would design a collection and pitch it to them. I did that over winter break two years ago.

Q: You get the greenlight in spring 2021. How does it unfold from there?

A: I designed sketches and drawings for 80 items, but they didn't get to developing engineering or prototypes until spring 2022. Then I began in earnest on the fabric and rug collections probably in December of last year. Fabric and rugs take a lot longer to develop because they're made all over the world. They come from Italy, Turkey, India, France and America. Rugs are woven in India and Nepal.

Q: I'll bet it's not often that a single designer is promoting three lines that are so connected to each other, with all of the products shown together at market and in advertising?

A: It was interesting to look at the synergy. I was working on designs, and some of the textile designs became rugs and some rug designs became fabric. In all of the photography, ads and social media, it gets three times the exposure when we showcase all three.

Q: So you were designing furniture and the textiles that the furniture could be made in and the rugs it all would sit on. Is it easier or harder to work like that, when you have whole rooms in mind instead of individual pieces?

A: I had six months with the furniture designs ... but when they greenlighted it, we didn't even settle on which pieces of the 80-plus sketches they would use. The hardest thing was the ability to visualize the showroom and materials all simultaneously without seeing any physical samples. I designed and accessorized the entire 2,000-square-foot showroom. I even hung the art myself.

Q: When I look at the pieces in your collection and the vignettes from High Point, I feel like I'm not just looking at more furniture but at things I haven't seen before - pieces that are fresh and new. Tell me about some of your favorite pieces and your inspiration.

A: We're not always blessed to have great architecture in a room, beautiful windows or a fireplace to work around. I created the Dante pedestal – which looks fabulous with or without something on it and comes in different finishes – for when a room needs tall verticals.

There's also the Titus cocktail table, which is 5 feet square. Large ottomans are often very low to the ground, no higher than 11 inches, and this one is 19

inches, and the base of it cuts through the top to look like a tray sitting in the middle of the table. There's another piece, the Terzo end table, a curved piece inspired by kitchens of the 1960s, that had a curved piece at the end of an island or peninsula. I wanted an end table with a solid back and no sharp outside corners. You can put a lamp on it and the cord hides between the back of it and the sofa.

The Rocco stools are meant to be a fabulous little curiosity within the room. They have cuff-like forms on either side, and that reference goes back to jewelry, bracelets, even though I don't wear jewelry myself. The Benito drink table, inspired by old ashtray tables, we sold 50 of them in two days. They're solid brass and heavy, so you can put a drink or phone on it, and they're hard to knock over.

There's also the Giatto eight-poster bed – I've never seen an eight-poster bed. It's got slender posts that we compounded in the corners, which creates a lot of beautiful details in fabric at the base of the leg. It's a handsome piece and was very popular at market.

Q: At a time when so much furniture, textiles and rugs are made in other countries, it should be noted that Chaddock makes all of its furniture in America, right?

A: There's a lot of furniture largely made overseas, even though they're American furniture companies. I wanted to play to the strengths and abilities of the Chaddock team in Morganton, N.C., I wanted the collection to be homegrown and made by craftsman here, so we didn't need to go overseas to produce the product. I didn't want to design a collection and then have them say, 'We'll make it all in Vietnam and import the pieces.' That was a guiding North Star.

Q: What's next? A nice vacation to finally relax?

A: Interior design has blown up, with so many people focusing on the interiors of their homes in the past few years. A lot of people say, 'I haven't seen you in a few years.' That's right, you haven't. I've had my head down, working. But I will look back on this time in my life as the most creatively rewarding period, for sure. Now I need to get caught up on everything else.

diane.cowen@chron.com



Written By
Diane Cowen

Reach Diane on



Diane Cowen has worked at the Houston Chronicle since 2000 and currently its architecture and home design writer. Prior to working for the Chronicle, she worked at the South Bend (Ind.) Tribune and at the Shelbyville (Ind.) News. She is a graduate of Purdue University and is the author of a cookbook, "Sunday Dinners: Food, Family and Faith from our Favorite Pastors."

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