



SOUTHERN SOPHISTICATE

*Old-world grace
meets modern glamour
in the realm of designer
Rivers Spencer*

*“Someone once told me that my style is ‘restrained elegance,’”
says Rivers Spencer with a laugh. “I don’t know if I believe that.”*

PHOTOS BY TIM BLACK PHOTOGRAPHY

It’s hard to imagine anything being truly restrained in the world that surrounds this Jackson native’s transformation from Ole Miss political science major to New Orleans design prodigy. In the four years since launching her interior design studio on Magazine Street, Spencer has been the protagonist of her own incredible Southern success story.

After quickly outgrowing her first eponymous Magazine Street shop, she opened one twice the size in a renovated double shotgun house a few blocks down. In 2014, she also launched the Rivers Spencer Collection of furnishings bench-made and hand-finished in New Orleans, and her pieces are now available through One Kings Lane.

Her latest initiative, a partnership with American furniture manufacturer Tritter Feefer, resulted in the launch of the “Rivers Spencer for Tritter Feefer” line that debuted at High Point Market in fall 2015. Spencer has been featured in *House Beautiful*, and her Facebook followers number more than 23,000. All this, and she just turned 30.

“I think success is 10% talent and 90% hard work,” she says. “I used to spend hours studying auction guides and reading everything I could get my hands on to teach myself this business.”

It’s hard to believe that just six years ago, Spencer was contemplating following in her mother’s footsteps into a career in law. In the meantime, she began renovating her grandmother’s home. During hours spent refinishing furniture, she felt a new calling, and it wasn’t long before she scrapped her law school plans in favor of interior design.

Spencer’s success stems from her ability to bridge the gap between old and new Southern style. A passion for antiques that she inherited from her mother, an avid collector, helped inform a style linking the looks of the past with updates that suit a modern lifestyle. Her company’s tagline says it all:

“TIMELESS. ELEGANT. TAILORED. FRESH.”



For her own home, half of a “camelback double shotgun” in uptown New Orleans, Spencer turned against her typical design strategy by focusing first on art—specifically, on incorporating many works from her personal collection. The challenge was working within the constraints of the 1,800-square-foot space with rooms only 11 ½ feet wide.

“I wanted it to have a very collected look,” Spencer says of the home, which was built around 1900. She began with a backdrop of Benjamin Moore’s “White Dove” paint, which she says “makes a really nice gallery canvas.”

In the living room, a painting by Anna Kincaide that Spencer found at her favorite New Orleans art space, Gallery Orange, is the centerpiece. Hanging above one of two closed fireplaces in this room, the bold black and white painting inspired Spencer to select complementary Schumacher striped window treatments. As has become her signature, she paired antique furnishings with contemporary lighting and art. Vintage Hermès scarves are framed in acrylic above the metallic leather sofa, which is paired with an ochre-finished, silver-leafed coffee table Spencer designed.



**“I’m always
SHARPENING
my style,”
she says. “It becomes
boring if you don’t
EVOLVE.”**

Schumacher cut-velvet fabric is used on slipper chairs flanking a 1700s chateau commode. Other artists represented here include Alexis Walter, Tupelo native Kevin Gillentine and Spencer’s aunt, Nashville artist Streater Spencer. Sleek pendant lights and lamps are by Ralph Lauren and carried in Spencer’s shop.

The original heart-pine floors continue in the dining room, where an antique English breakfast table is paired with modern chairs atop a chevron-patterned cowhide rug. Spencer transformed an oversized open cabinet by having it lacquered in robin’s-egg blue and backed with a mirror; it now stands in as a bar area when not being used to hold her collection of antique Chinoiserie temple jars. The art in this room is by Jackson native Arrington Magny and Amanda Talley.

The master bedroom, with its “simple, clean and white” vibe, is more reflective of Spencer’s usual decorating style. She designed the velvet-covered bed and had it made; the style has since been placed in several clients’ homes. The Lili Alessandra bedding is from Spencer’s shop, and the draperies are her go-to soft white panels. But even in such a cozy space, Spencer is seldom at rest. After all, constant change is what has gotten her this far, this fast.