

A man with a tattoo on his left arm, wearing a red t-shirt and paint-splattered jeans, is smiling as he uses a brush to paint a large, abstract wall. The wall features a gradient of purple and pink colors. In the background, there is a metal shelving unit filled with various paint cans and supplies. The man is holding a spray bottle in his left hand.

KING OF COLOR

Ringling College grad and HGTV star **David Bromstad** talks about his career, lots of color, and his love of Sarasota.

By Ryan G. Van Cleave.

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“ I just don't think there are any rules to color. You have a small space with no windows? Put lamps in there, make it dramatic, paint the ceiling black. Do something with it. If it's dark, accentuate the darkness. ”

- David Bromstad





While most might know David Bromstad as the winner of **HGTV's Design Star**, the host of his own HGTV show **Color Splash**, or the high-energy interior designer who's been featured in *People magazine*, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, or *Ellen*, but did you know that he got his real start in the art world at the Ringling College of Art + Design? "It's where the best drawers and teachers were," he explains about his choice to move to Sarasota all the way from the small town of Plymouth, Minnesota, which was a real culture shock.

Like so many Ringling students, David thought he'd love to work for one of the Big Three: Disney, Dreamworks, or Pixar. Like a lucky few graduates, he got his chance. After leaving Ringling College with a degree in illustration, he was offered employment by Disney, only it was as a visual designer in the stores which is a far cry from animating *Mulan III*. "It wasn't that creative of work," he explains about those long hours in the retail stores. "Put those t-shirts here, move those boxes there. That kind of thing."

His big break came when he applied for and got a temp job for the parks production company — this meant that for the next year and a half, he sculpted for Walt Disney World in Orlando. When that job was up, he transitioned to being a contractor for Disney, working heavily with resorts and parks for the next six years. During that time, he conceived and executed major installations for Islands of Adventure, Universal Studios, and Walt Disney World, which was a lot of fun for a guy who really enjoyed working with hands like David did. "And there wasn't a store that I didn't have some of my own art or sculpture in," he says proudly.

Then 9/11 happened and like so many companies, Disney suddenly got thrifty, which meant nearly all of their contractors were let go. David was adrift. He felt the same way he did when he arrived at Ringling College, originally so gung-ho to be a Disney animator, but suddenly wondering if his wide-ranging art interests might be better served in a different way. The real world pressures like rent payments and grocery bills were putting a lot of stress on him.

Yet luck struck again when an interior designer David knew from the gym asked to see his portfolio because this man needed art-work done for some hotels. All the color-popping Disneyesque work David shared the next day was such a hit that he instead was asked to design kids' rooms for the model homes this man created all throughout the Southeast. It was pretty easy to transition from the Disney work to creating magical, fun rooms for kids, says David. A kid's room is basically about props, and he'd been building props for Disney for years, teaching himself carpentry along the way. And he learned a lot too, saying, "The big





lesson from designing so many kids' rooms? The wow factor. A kid wants to run into their bedroom and yell "This is the coolest bed I've ever seen!"

And then came the opportunity to be on *HGTV's Design Star*, which David won, netting him a Mercury Mariner SUV and his own TV design show. The skills he'd developed through Ringling College, Disney, and designing kids' rooms served him well, with viewers saying his creativity and boldness really wowed them. "The big lesson I took away from that experience was to just be myself. Being gay wasn't a great idea to present on TV at that time," he explains. "But I had to be me. And that ultimately is what made all the difference. I learned to trust my gut and not second-guess myself."

He likens his time on that show as being in a designer boot camp. They took away the newspapers, the radio, the TV, even his beloved cell phone. "All we had was a lot of time to ourselves," he says. And he really got to know — and trust — who he was as a person and a designer. What a remarkable, important lesson for the 32-year-old artist!

Now this award-winning designer is a mentor on *Design Star* and he has his own TV show, *Color Splash*. He's also quickly become one of the most dynamic figures in the world of design. Who better to give some design ideas and tips than someone who calls himself "eclectically whimsical" and in his (rare moments of) down time enjoys a glass of Grey Goose?

David Bromstad On:

Paint: “Paint is the easiest, simplest, and cheapest way to transform a space. Paint a wall or furniture. Add stripes. Put in graphic patterns,” he says, though he understands that most people are a little afraid of color. “If you want to start slow, do a feature wall and leave the rest neutral,” he suggests. It might seem overly dramatic at first, but once you load the room back up with furniture — like they do on *Color Splash* — it quickly becomes a backdrop.

Trends: One of the significant trends in design right now is the use of recycled materials. “The stuff you find at Pottery Barn, Target, or Home Goods, it’s distressed. It has a deliberate aged look to it.” Why? In times of turmoil with the economy not helping matters any, people enjoy these soft tones that easily hearken back to their childhood. “That’s where design is at,” he says. “And it’ll stay that way for awhile.”

Color: For those looking for a color tip, it’s purple, he swears. And not just because he currently owns more purple sweaters than any time before in his life. “Purple usually comes in but leaves just as quickly,” he admits. But this time, it’ll be here for some time. The fashion industry has been enamored with shades of purple for years, and that’s now trickling down to the design world, too. So think purple for 2012 and beyond. It’s flirty, it’s optimistic, and it’s just plain fun.

Influences: One of his biggest influences? The French product designer Philippe Starck, who’s done everything from hotels to condos to restaurants to residential homes. “I love his aesthetic,” David says. “Really beautiful work, but with such a clever sense of humor, too.”

His Own Future: Like his hero, Philippe Starck, David is branching out in a variety of ways by creating exciting new works across many platforms, including interior design, furniture building, and custom art. Perhaps most noteworthy is his appearance at Art Basel Miami in December 2011 where he showcased his first-ever public collection, entitled “Body, Money, Death.” “21 new pieces in four weeks,” he says about that time. “It was incredibly time-consuming, the hardest thing I’ve ever done.” A news statement from him prior to the event warned: “Fierceness is on its way.” And from the critical and public reaction, he delivered big-time.









David's now involved with four TV shows, including two design competition shows he can't reveal much about yet. And for those who can't get enough of his work, his art reproductions are now available through Penny Lane Publishing and Murals Your Way, and his bedding and bath line with global textile manufacturer 1888 Mills will be available in 2012, as will a collection of bar accessories from Thirstystone. Whew, it's hard to imagine when this dynamo designer finds the time to sleep!

While he looks forward to even more career success in the coming year — which he so richly deserves — he's also really looking forward to coming back to Sarasota. "Going to school there was a little weird. At 18, 19, 20 years old, it's so easy to think it's just some boring city. But I miss the beach, the people, the art, the culture, the school," he says with that huge Hollywood smile. "I can't wait to go back." [S](#)