

For longtime Dallas designer Robert Rutherford, his journey in beautiful things and interiors all started with an elegant Victorian mansion in Columbus, Ohio.



**Texas Home & Living:** Tell me a little bit about your background. What made you decide to enter the interior design field? How did you get started in the business? How long have you worked in the industry?

## ROBERT RUTHERFORD

*Robert Rutherford:* My decision was more like a journey to a foreign land where one explores and discovers and grows. It began in 1963 when I left the military and rented the fourth floor of an elegant, Victorian mansion owned by Edna Moreland in Columbus, Ohio. Recognizing my awed interest in the beauty of her home, she began to nourish it with introductions to “the right people” and design classes at the museum and historical houses. This truly launched my career as an interior designer.

Then, Ruth Wilson, the owner of one of the largest design showrooms in the area gave me my first job in the design field and my journey intensified and expanded. I was exposed to the New York design markets and antique shops. As I worked with Ruth on various designer showhouses and public projects, my skills and understanding of the business grew. These were the formative years of my life as



a designer. The feeling of a journey of exploration, discovery, and of being mentored by people who care is still with me today.

**TH&L: What brought you to Dallas?**

RR: By 1972 my reputation had grown so that the manager of John Edward Hughes at the Design Center in Dallas came to Columbus to hire me. I was the vice president of John Edward Hughes until I opened my own shop.

**TH&L: When did you open Rutherford's and how has it evolved since its conception?**

RR: In 1989, my wife, Anna, and I along with our two children, Lee Ann and Jon, opened Rutherford's on Lover's Lane. Today, my family and I, along with a design and sales staff of 16, are still on Lover's Lane.

**TH&L: What is the biggest challenge you have overcome being in the design industry?**

RR: My eyes are bigger than my pocket book.

**TH&L: What is your design philosophy?**

RR: I strive for comfortable seating, fine art work, beautiful antiques, and always something amusing.

**TH&L: What would you say your biggest professional accomplishment has been?**

RR: Developing friendships with my clients has contributed to Rutherford's becoming part of the community. Being part of the community where you live and work is a valuable asset. Staying in business in spite of economic ups and downs is an accomplishment for any of us.

**TH&L: Who or what gives you inspiration? What design era has influenced you the most?**

RR: At the top of my list are: Mark Hampton whose focus was on English Country; Sister Parish for her classic elegance and marvelous color; and Bill Baldwin with his love of beauty and proportion, and superhuman tolerance for idiosyncrasy coupled with his wonderfully accepting humor.

**TH&L: Who has been a mentor or a major influence in your work?**

RR: My clients and family are my constant mentors each in their own way through their passions for history and culture, their involvement with nature, and their desire to bring beauty into their daily lives.

**TH&L: What is in your design library?**

RR: I have a growing library with every book I can afford and a mountain of *Architectural Digest*. I highly recommend *A Passion For Detail* by Charlotte Moss, *Van Day Truex: The Man Who Defined Twentieth-Century Taste and Style* by Adam Lewis and Albert Hadley, and *Designer Guide to Furniture Styles* by Trenea Crochet.





**TH&L: What is the first thing you do when starting a new project?**

RR: I talk to the man of the house. He always has an opinion and needs to be addressed.

**TH&L: Many designers are inspired by art, architecture, colors, and culture they see and experience on their travels. Do you find this as well? If so, what is a favorite interior or image you have seen on your travels?**

RR: Yes, there is no doubt that the places I have seen traveling have had an impact on my work. My most favorite are Brighton Pavilion in England, Rouen Cathedral and Chateau de Malmaison in France.

**TH&L: Describe one of your most memorable projects to date.**

RR: Actually, several come to mind. There was an exciting cottage and garden in Terrell, Texas for a lady who loves Texas plantings. Her house was a historical home, so it was covered on the outside by generations of layered paint ranging in color from pink to avocado. The inside contained a rich display of layer upon layer of history and plants ranging from the interesting to the outrageous, all tied together with a 1950 aesthetic, brocades, and animal skins.

Then there was a fabulous mansion on Lakeside Drive. It was the estate of a prominent Dallas family whose owner's amazing energy and love for her home was inspirational. Her vast art collection became the backdrop for refurbishing the entire home for her daughter's wedding. It was a high point for us and the family.

The other was a lovely new French chateau in Dallas. It was filled with generations of family heirlooms. By using a combination of simple window treatments and seating we brought the whole home up to date creating a marvelous blend of then and now.

**TH&L: Is there any kind of project you particularly love?**

RR: The one I'm working on.

**TH&L: What do you love most about being a designer?**

RR: I love the fact that it's never dull. I love helping people enjoy changing their focus in life. Take "empty nesters" for example. They are a real pleasure because they have a lifetime of treasures and helping them pare things down to a beautiful statement of their new direction in life is a pure joy.

## designer profile

**JENIFER JORDAN**  
photography

architectural interior exterior product catalog



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**TH&L: What is your advice to other designers? Homeowners?**

RR: Designing a home should be a joyous experience filled with discovery. And, don't take yourself too seriously.

**TH&L: Tell me about an average day for you.**

RR: I have breakfast with my wife, Anne, and we discuss design projects, challenges, and the shop. Appointments begin by 10 a.m. Each day brings its own set of circumstances, but I'm usually back in the shop by late afternoon. That's my time to help my other designers if there is a need and to spruce up the shop so it stays fresh and interesting.

**TH&L: What are the essentials you need to live, work, and create?**

RR: A happy home life. Good friends. Flowers in and outside my home. Books – especially the Bible. Something sweet. And a good joke.

**TH&L: Describe your favorite place.**

RR: My own library filled with books and collections, family, and comfort.

**TH&L: What is your advice to other designers?**

RR: Embrace Dallas and give them the best you can. Most of all, have fun!

**TH&L: How would you describe today's design culture in Dallas? How have you seen it change and where do you see it headed?**

RR: When I moved to Dallas in the early 1970s it was like the "Promised Land." Dallas was where people from everywhere came to shop and it was booming with a zest for life. Now it is a cosmopolitan city with good architecture and interior design. There is culture, power, and money along with great style and an enjoyment of life.

**TH&L: Is there anything you would like to add?**

RR: Mies van der Roche is credited with saying, "Less is more." I go along with Venturi who said, "Less is a bore!" TH&L



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