



# GET SANTIFIED

Meet Interior Designer David Santiago

BY JENNIFER JENSEN

**Interior designer David Santiago has a passion for what he does and window treatments, in particular. After all, that is where he got his start.**

One summer when assisting a contractor with a project at a condominium, he was exposed to a tailored balloon shade window treatment and was instantly intrigued. He knew nothing about window treatments and asked the installer what it was. They started talking and the owner invited Santiago to come tour a new workroom he had just acquired. "It's a story of my life," Santiago said. While giving Santiago a tour, the owner told him about a window treatment company that was looking for help in their store. He put Santiago in touch with Nassau's Window Fashions in Ridgewood, New Jersey. Santiago interviewed and was hired as an entry-level worker in the ready-made department. "I learned the whole gamut and was mentored by, what I called them, my designing women," he said.

At Nassau's Window Fashions, custom window treatments were on the first floor and ready-mades were on the second. "And I always wanted to be on the first floor," he said. Thanks to a mentor who saw Santiago's potential, he eventually made his way to the first floor.

He spent a lot of time coming back to the workroom and learning about pattern cutting, sewing, seams, different styles of valances and window treatments. "As his workroom grew and expanded, my knowledge grew," he added.

While working as the new design consultant for Nassau's showroom in Paramus, he met the district manager for Calico Corners, who was checking in on the competition unbeknownst to him. Santiago spoke with her and gave her his business card. Thirty minutes later, she called Santiago to offer him a job as a shop-at-home salesman. "I was David in full bloom," he recalled of the encounter.

During his early years in the industry, he soaked up every ounce of knowledge he could. "I lived and breathed it—and no one could touch me," he said. "I could walk in and calculate inch pleats. I could do a lot of calculations on-site by eye at this point."

A couple of years later, he started working for an interior design firm in New York as a window treatment specialist. "It was always about being able to walk into a space and come up with a design, calculate, sell it, out the door," Santiago said. "I was always a salesman. In our industry, that's what we do at the end of the day. You are selling a product. Information is bliss. The more you know at the point of sale, the better it is. The stronger you are."

This is where Santiago said he really dove into the world of interior design. "Window treatments always got me through the door." Lots of people can be intimidated by window treatments, but Santiago said the trick is

just taking the time to learn about them and not settling for just simple designs. "I always want to go outside the box," he added.

He said he is proud of his journey and is so appreciative of all the mentors he had along the way. "I took it in like a sponge and it gave me leverage for the journey I was on. The more I learned and the more I acquired, the stronger I was."

Now, Santiago is the owner of Casa Santi Interior Design LLC. He does full restorations, new constructions, renovations and is moving into commercial and hospitality spaces.

**WINDOW FASHION VISION:** How would you describe your design style?

**DAVID SANTIAGO:** Everything is Santified. It's short and to the point. Embrace the unexpected. Embrace the unknown. Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. I like to have fun with everything I do. Individual style is about layering and color. I'm not a maximalist. I would say my work is more exuberant and full of life and color.

**WFFV:** How do you approach a new client, a new design?

**DS:** My favorite thing is always working with a couple, whether they are older or younger. And the husband goes, "Whatever she wants." I say, "Hey, this is your home



PHOTOS: TIM CREE / CREEPWALK MEDIA

and your space as well ... don't you ever utter a word of discontent because you weren't a part of it. Not on my watch." We start having a conversation. I look at them. I look at what they're wearing. I'll go to their closets. I'll ask about their lifestyle. What kind of work they do. How they walk into a space. Suddenly, it becomes a way of living and working in a space. And I pride myself on that conversation because really if two people are living in a home, they have to cohabitate and it's not about, "Oh, whatever you want, honey. I don't care." Bull. You do care. Those are the simple applications I apply to my clients.

**WFV:** How do you deal with difficult clients?

**DS:** Psychology. At this point in my life, I'm trying to not get emotional. I stay on the facts of the matter and the tasks and avoid all the words and the stuff that get in the way. I try to make it very transparent and easy ... It truly is about listening. And the intent of that message is to be able to resolve the project in the most professional way.

**WFV:** What is the end goal of a design?

**DS:** Form and function, truly. How is the space going to be utilized? Is it a single woman, bachelor, divorcee, a family with newborns, a family with five kids? Truly it is form and function and lifestyle. Who is this space for and how is it utilized? And then we go from there.

**WFV:** What role do window treatments play in the overall design?

**DS:** They're the gowns and the suits of the room. I think they are the suit, the hat, the scarf. I think they are one of the final touches of the room that really give you a sense of the design ... For me, it's the layering effect. There's nothing more beautiful than walking into a space and seeing even a simple ivory linen drape from floor to ceiling just kind of framing the windows and giving it that softness. And swapping out. Sometimes I go as far as seasonal window treatments.

**WFV:** Any styles or trends you see on the horizon?

**DS:** Lately, it is motorized and also insulating properties. The cell shades, as I like to call them ... those treatments are coming back a lot. And a lot of semiopaque applications. People want a sense of privacy, but to not block out the light. And I do a lot of roman shades. I do flat romans. They are tailored and clean, but you can do a really nice fabric and call it a day. Woven woods. Woven woods add a nice flavor of texture. They're organic, some of them are sustainable and they also add a global element to the windows. You can go from the Caribbean to Maui to Fiji to Bali and go across the world. Just for a window



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**There are 100 shades of white or beige, and I've always told my clients, 'You don't need me for white or beige; you need me for the champagne and pearls.'**  
 — David Santiago  
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treatment. They have a sense of memory for a lot of people.

**WFV:** What inspires you?

**DS:** Something as simple as trade magazines and also attending trade shows. I am very active in my industry. I attend a lot of trade shows ... Trades shows for me are essential keys to keeping me fresh and seeing what's new and what's next. And also following my peers, my colleagues, in all aspects of design ... And then I would have to say the theater. Opera always inspires me. [Santiago is a professional opera singer.] There's always an opera in

my head. When I walk into spaces, I always think of different acts. There's always something going on in my head. I'm smiling because it's a fun place to be.

**WFV:** What's next for you?

**DS:** There's always something new going. Right now, I'm exploring taking my wall covering collection into fabrics and window treatments. I'd like to evolve into my product design. ▣

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