

LIVING WITH DESIGN

# DESIGN

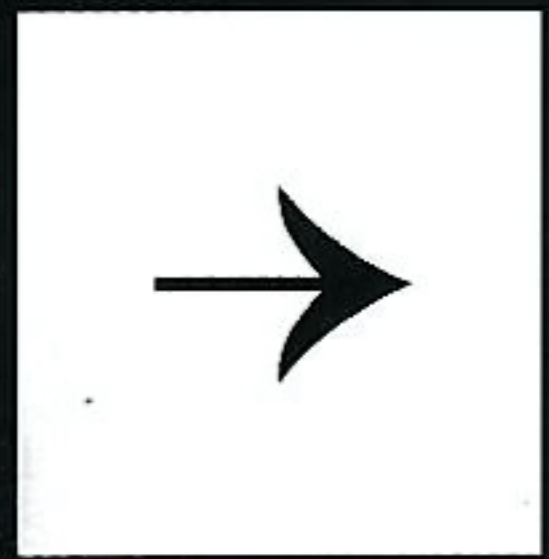
CONNECT  
@eurotrashannie



## History Buff

Designer Annie Brahler converts a 1920s building into a new studio space for Euro Trash.

BY CHARLENE OLDHAM



PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEVIN A. ROBERTS



HISTORIC RENOVATION

MORE THAN 20 years in the design business has taught Annie Brahler a thing or two about historic properties, and she's drawn on that experience to guide the newest iteration of her design studio, Euro Trash, which she relocated from Ballwin to Webster Groves this past summer.

"We did a little bit of detective work to see if this [space] was something that could be restored," says Brahler. "We didn't want to recreate history; we wanted to uncover it."

There were encouraging early signs that a rescue plan would yield promising results: glimpses of limestone beneath the concrete, hints of copper under a coat of blue paint on the window surrounds.

"It's like a treasure hunt," says the designer.

But it hasn't been easy or inexpensive to restore some of the historical hallmarks of the new headquarters. Bricks, boards, and paint obscured windows that needed new tuckpointing before they could be reglazed—or replaced—and cleaned. It took four hot summer days, recalls Brahler, to chip away at the concrete that masked a sign dating back to the 1920s.

"Under about an inch and a half of concrete skim coat, we found the [building's] original limestone sign," Brahler says. After unveiling the words "Car Company" at the end of the sign, and then the letters "B" and "U" at the front of it, Brahler "would have put money on it" that the full sign read, "Buick." The mysterious car company was finally revealed to be the Busy Bee Motor Car Company, whose logo included carved bumblebees between words. "The craftsmanship and the history," she says, "it's just beautiful to see."

Other artifacts have been hidden in plain sight, like the near-pristine limestone finials, found lying on the roof.

"I guess the biggest hurdles are when you find something and are determined to restore it [but] it takes a lot of labor and it takes money. You have to figure out how much you want it and what it's going to take and go for it," she says.

The challenges have been accompanied by some unexpected happy notes for the industry veteran. Her new neighbors often stop by to share words of encouragement.

"It sounds hokey," Brahler says, "but they are so incredibly nice that sometimes it feels like I'm on a movie set."

She's also been buoyed by the support of

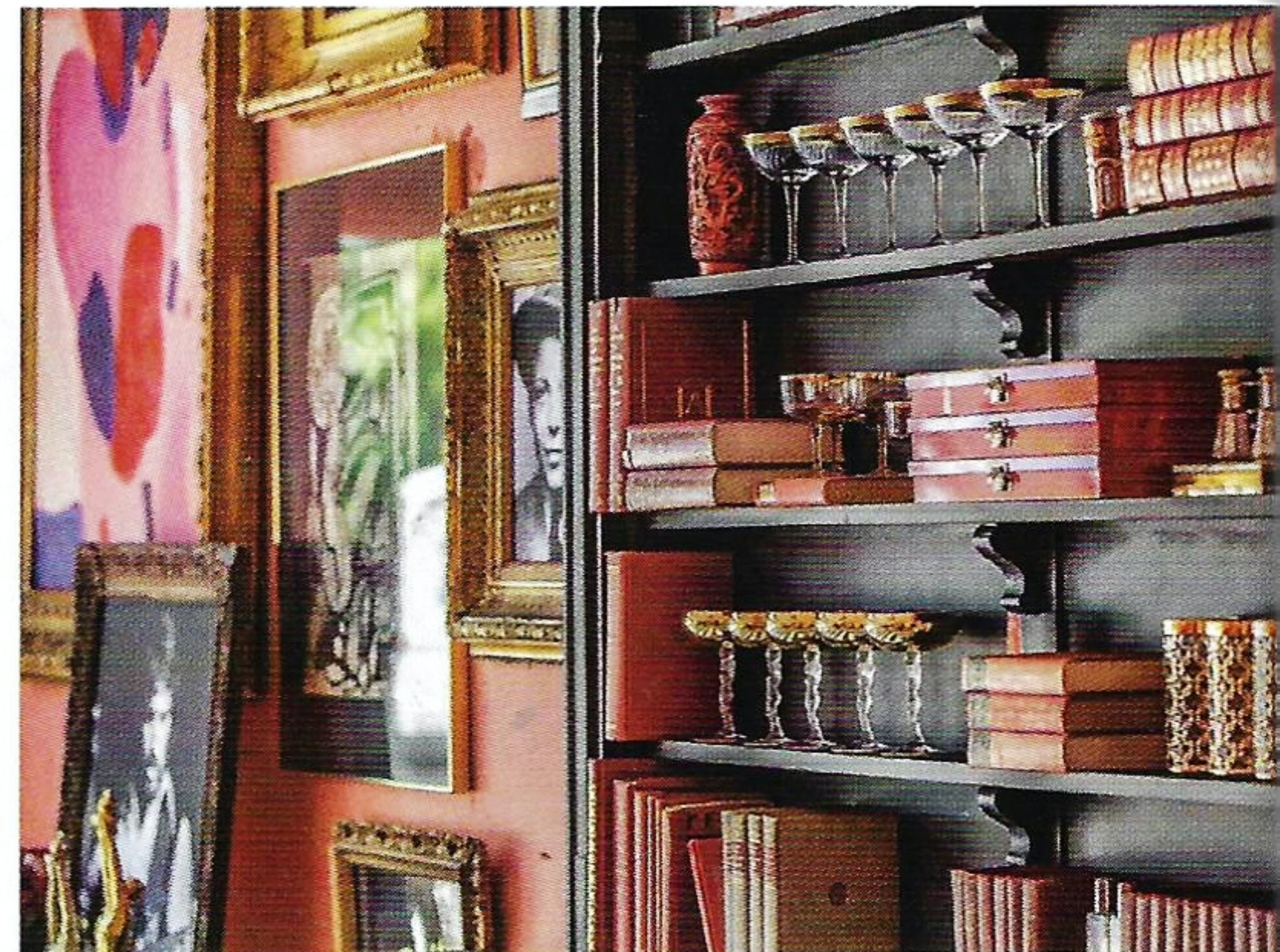


PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEVIN A. ROBERTS



city officials and the Lemcke family, who own the building.

"I love the fact that people like Annie and Charlie truly appreciate the history and character of the community but also want to add to that history with their own unique designs," says David Lemcke, who helps run the family trust from his home in Oklahoma City. Though the design is true to the history of the building, the finishing touches are all



Euro Trash. The floors, in a black-and-white chevron pattern, are textbook Brahler.

"Annie can put any style together and make it work," says Ronnie Vinton, owner of Cool Stuff Period, who supplied some of the vintage items for the new space. "Everything she does is just so good."

Brahler has always maintained a studio close to wherever she's making her home, and this time is no different. Brahler, and her husband Charles Smith, sold their Midcentury glass house in West County earlier this year and purchased a Tudor cottage within walking distance. She says it's critical to her business, and to the creative process, to have a place to meet with her team.

"It's important for us to be inspired by the things around us," she says. —C.O.