



Paloma Contreras (right) and Devon Liedtke (left) in their dreamy new decor shop, Paloma & Co., in River Oaks.

IMAGE: [KERRY KIRK](#)

PALOMA CONTRERAS DOESN'T WANT to be boxed in—by her job, by what her peers are doing, or by what others describe as an “insane” workload.

The Houston-based designer first started out as a Spanish teacher at Bellaire High School. “I just felt creatively stifled,” she says. So in 2007, she made a career switch, devoting more hours to her blog, *La Dolce Vita*, around the same time she and her husband purchased their first home. “I didn’t set out to write a design blog, but it organically took on that focus because I noticed a void in that market. I thought, ‘this is what’s inspiring me, so this is what I should write about,’” she says.

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Today, she's the one doing the inspiring. Training her eye for detail and constantly working to build upon her design knowledge allowed Contreras to create an empire in seemingly a blink. She soon after launched her own firm, Paloma Contreras Design, and was recently inducted to [Elle Decor's A List](#). This fall, she published her first book, *Dream, Design, Live*. And just last week, she and partner in all things pretty Devon Liedtke opened a dreamy decor haven, [Paloma & Co.](#), in River Oaks that Contreras's followers, clients, peers, and [even Architecture Digest are ogling over](#).

We checked in with the self-made mogul less than a week after opening day.



The shop, Contreras's first brick-and-mortar retail venture, is located in a restored cottage at the Creative Cottages owned by Matt Camron at 2705 Bammel Lane.

IMAGE: [KERRY KIRK](#)

How did Paloma & Co. come to be?

I dreamt about starting a store for a good while, and I thought it would be a natural extension of the platform that I have been able to build online. A couple of years ago, my partner in the store, Devon Liedtke, came to work with me at the design firm. We quickly realized that we shared a passion for things that are handmade and tell a story. Meanwhile, I was traveling quite a bit and was finding interesting things. We thought, 'Wouldn't it be fun to do something together and to find a place to curate all of these interesting things and share our point of view?'

What do you and Devon bring out in the other?

We are just cut from a very similar cloth. After showing up to work wearing the same exact outfit multiple times, we realized that we have a really similar aesthetic and we are frequently on the same wavelength. Devon has a background as a table top buyer and has worked in that avenue of retail before. We thought if we brought our talent together and our different perspectives, we could be stronger as a team.

What do you look for in a piece to carry at the shop? What makes you say, "we have to have that?"

We have to genuinely love everything. We were joking that we almost didn't want to open because we love everything so much and we didn't want to part with it. We knew that coming into this space, we didn't just want to replicate what other people are doing and offer the same products. We are working with artisans from France, Japan, and Mexico. We also have beautiful antiques that I have personally found, as well as original art from emerging Southern artists who we really believe in. [There are also products] that I have used in design projects in the past that are tried and true.





Contreras and Liedtke are always on the hunt for handmade and interesting pieces for the shop, like these wicker chairs and abstract mirrors. Inventory is small and constantly rotating.

IMAGE: [KERRY KIRK](#)

Where do you see the store fitting into Houston's design and retail scene?

I think what is really special about the shop is that it's housed in the Matt Camron Creative Cottages. You walk in and it feels like you're in someone's home. Everything is hand-picked, so we don't have a ton of inventory, but everything works well together and tells a story. For example, we have one candle line from Australia, but they smell divine. You're not going to have to figure out, 'which of these 50 candles do I want?'

How does opening the shop compare to you other projects: the blog, interior designs, your book?

People ask me if I'm insane opening a shop on the heels of my book tour—and to some degree I must be! But the store itself has been so fun to work on. There were a lot of moving parts behind remodeling our space and making sure our inventory arrived on time. That can all be a little stressful, just like working on a client project. But the fun part is that we are not working for a specific client. It really is just a pure interpretation of our style and what we love the most. There are no limits on our creativity.





Paloma & Co. is the exclusive retailer in Houston for several up and coming Southern artists, including Alexis Walters, featured here.

IMAGE: [KERRY KIRK](#)

What advice would you give to someone who is designing their home for the first time or wants an overhaul? Where should they start?

I talk a lot about this in my book: *Dream, Design, Live*. The first section, *Dream*, is all about finding inspiration and how to comb through that. I frequently hear that people are overwhelmed by the number of things they are inspired by and are not sure what direction to take. I would say listen to your own voice, work hard at putting together some inspiration and figuring out what it is that you love about those images. What is the common thread? And start with your bigger pieces that will ground the space—whether it's a rug or a sofa—and then work around those.

What's next for you?

I'm probably going to attempt to slow down a little bit. But I do have my first licensed collection coming out with a major American brand this year. I can't divulge the details yet, but it's very exciting and just around the corner. We are also working on producing our own furniture, lighting, and accessories to carry in the store

to make sure we have a product offering that you can't find anywhere else.

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