



CUSTOM COUTURE

INSIDE THE WORLD OF PERSONAL HOME COUTURE WITH E. BRAUN & CO.

BY ALYSON PITARRE

Step inside the E. Braun & Co. showroom in West Hollywood's bustling design district, and you will be initiated into the rarified world of fine linens. Animal print cashmere throws. Hand-embroidered Giza cotton sheets. Specialty cocktail napkins for every occasion (pink flamingos, anyone?).

With any luck, owner Elizabeth Barbatelli will be in the shop on the day of your excursion. She quickly rattles off the intricacies involved in ancient European weaving techniques and offers a brief tutorial on fine linen care. There are only a handful of people in the United States who possess this level

Elizabeth Barbatelli & Chopper

of textile knowledge. It is the reason she has been sought out by celebrities, prominent West Coasters and interior designers who want made-to-order linen collections that are true expressions of their homes and personal styles. In the area of "personal home couture," Barbatelli shines.

What follows is a summary of our conversation, edited for clarity and brevity.

What makes E. Braun & Co. special?

What makes us special is our expertise. We also understand what discerning clients need and want as part of their lifestyle. We work closely with individual homeowners to develop one-of-a-kind linens for their home. We can help our clients manage the details of their entire residence, right down to each room in their house and, sometimes, private jet or yacht. However, we also work closely with interior designers and decorators to build out tailor-made bed, bath and table linens that complement the textiles and furnishings they've already selected for their design palette. Because we have been doing this for so long and we keep meticulous records, we can work with house managers to fulfill any specialty reorders. For the majority of people, once the project is over, it's them or an assistant doing the reordering. When they see the E. Braun label inside a bed sheet or on a bath towel, they call us. We keep complete project details on file, so it makes reordering seamless.

Where do you find inspiration for your designs?

Some of the designs are inspired by our visits to the artisan workrooms in Europe. Some of the designs come directly from our clients who have asked us to create something special for them. And some of the

designs I develop myself and put our label on it. We offer a full range of products — from simple, contemporary designs to traditional designs with elaborate detailing. In addition to our made-to-order collections, we have many linens that are in stock and available for those with short lead times. We can help with those kinds of solutions if clients need them.

Why would homeowners want to have your linens in their home?

The quality and the fit. We work with higher quality sheeting, higher quality finishing details, higher quality embroidery. Our embroideries are more elaborate than anything you would find in the mass market. If a collection is handmade, we have it finished in a specific way. We are very particular, and we make sure that things are finished to my standards, the standards that have become synonymous with the E. Braun label. Before our linens are delivered to our clients, we make sure that they are the best they can be. We don't cut corners to make prices lower. Our clients return to us again and again, because we can create something so special and tailored to them, and in the quality that they expect from a fine linen house.

What's your process for working with designers?

We try to work with them from the ground up, through a process of selecting bedding, bath or table linens. We invite designers to come into the showroom with their fabric swatches at an early stage in the design process, and we go room by room, until

we find the right fabrics, colors or complete made-to-order designs that match their design palette.

What's the one mistake you see designers make when selecting fine linens for their clients' projects?

A common mistake is that they do not incorporate linens into their budget and concept planning at the onset of their design project. Ideally, they need to come into our showroom at the beginning of the process, when they are selecting fabrics, finishes, textiles and furnishings. We encourage them to engage us at an earlier point in the design process, because they have more flexibility and more choices at that point. It's much harder to find high quality linen selections that match drapery or upholstery motifs if a designer says he or she needs bed linens in four weeks. We believe our linens should be part of their overall vision for the house. If the linens are integrated into the design budget from the very beginning, this also reduces the chance of clients getting what I call "budget fatigue," which often happens at the end of the project.

What was one of the most unique made-to-order items E. Braun & Co. has created?

I had a client who loves our sheets so much that she asked me to create custom travel bedding that she could take with her on long overnight flights. Now she can sleep in our sheets, no matter where she is — whether it's on a plane, on a yacht or in a hotel room!

E. Braun & Co. helps homeowners and designers create one-of-a-kind linens for the home, from the bed to the tabletop.



PHOTOS COURTESY E. BRAUN & CO.

