

Pleased to Meet You

by Gillian - Thursday, October 09, 2014

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Architect Nathan Colkitt, a UA alum who will return to Tucson as part of Tucson Fashion Week, talks empathetic design, the evolution of men's fashion and his eternal optimism. By Joan Calcagno.

Nathan Colkitt, who will be part of Tucson Fashion Week.

Early bird or night owl? “You know, I love the morning and I think I’m an early bird, but I definitely enjoy staying up too. I work the best at night and am the most creative at night but there’s nothing like the morning and the sun coming up. That’s a really special time and I enjoy that. I enjoy personal time in the morning and at night I enjoy socializing, being creative, going out and being around people. But the morning is definitely for me. It’s like a special communion with the day.”

The Cartel Coffee Lab in Phoenix, one of Colkitt & Co's designs. Photo by Cheryl Ramsay.

Favorite accessory? “I really love cufflinks. I think those are a really fun accessory. Right now I’m into stuff from the 1920s and 30s and so I’ve been collecting gold cufflinks. I’ve got some very cool ones that I’m really happy with. They’re really special and delicate. Jewelry, especially men’s jewelry, has become so chunky – it’s become so big, which is cool and I can appreciate that, but men’s cufflinks used to be so elegant and nice and not overdone. I like wearing them with a contemporary shirt that’s cut very classical.”

Favorite faux pas? “I have a lot of unfavorite ones. Favorite faux pas? That’s so tough. But if you take it back to design, I really think great design is all about empathy. The greatest designers have to have the utmost empathy for the client’s situation to be able to truly understand what somebody wants. So it really bothers me when there is a void and people don’t really try to understand. It makes it really hard when you don’t connect.”

One of Colkitt & Co's residential designs. Photo by Jim Bartsch and Cheryl Ramsay.

Who is your dream customer? “I like to say that I don’t really have one. I try to be in the moment as much as possible. I like to approach design as though I’m six years old and have never experienced this before. So when I meet any person that is a potential client, I love that experience of meeting them for the first time. I feel every client is better and better. So I try not to have a favorite or expectations. For me, that’s worked out really well in the sense that our next customer, our next project, always is the best one.”

If I weren’t an architect I would... “Be on ‘permacation’ - permanently on vacation. Any kind of down, beach-time I can get. I definitely opt for that. I try to visit friends and family all over the place. You have to make time for that. I would literally go insane if I didn’t take time off once-in-a-while.”

If I could change one thing I would... “I’m very idealistic and sometimes, you know, your greatest strength is your biggest weakness in life. I’m so optimistic that sometimes it’s hard to get grounded and back to reality because you over-estimate how wonderful and easy life is. Sometimes it would be nice to be able to relate to people more and not think everything is so wonderful.”

What or who are you seen wearing the most? “I usually dress pretty casually and try to fit in most days. But I do like dressing up probably more than the average person. My favorite thing to wear is men’s fashion from the 1930s. There were so many different options and styles, but there was a lot of restraint. It was a really interesting time. Similar to the 70s in the sense that anytime you see a really bad economy, you see everything under the sun, and yet there is a lot of conservatism at some level. Wide lapels and generous proportions came back in the 70s, inspired partially by the 30s. It was one of the best times for men’s fashion.”

***As part of [Tucson Fashion Week’s Launch Party](#), Nathan will judge the Designer Competition where each fashion designer will create a garment inspired by a Colkitt & Co architecture structure. Thursday October 16th at Connect Coworking, 33 South 5th Ave. Tickets available [here](#).**

***Find out more about Nathan and his San Diego and New York-based firm Colkitt & Co. at colkitt.com.**