



# CREATIVE FREEDOM

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The notion that **Friedemann Weinhardt**, owner of Design First Interiors, may have more than a little bit of a free-spirit within, stems from his early days of creating unique furniture to sell at a local flea market. He designed everything from beds to birdcages, all in an attempt to free himself from conventional employment.



## Style and good taste a recipe for fine design

However, there is no denying the fact that this award-winning designer has made a good business for himself or that he is considered one of the best kitchen designers in Ottawa. This is what makes me think of him as a “hippie-capitalist” – a creative genius and astute business man who has found the perfect balance for nurturing both sides of his personality. Lucky man!

*Ottawa At Home* spent time with Friedemann and Luna (his Weimaraner), in his home overlooking the Britannia Yacht club. Built by Uniform Developments and designed by Barry Hobin, with input from Friedemann, the open-concept townhouse is a tribute to the combination of talents. Soaring windows upstairs and down, take advantage of water and park views to create a dramatic space that houses a man whose life has been dedicated to creativity and personal expression.

**CLOCKWISE:** Friedemann Weinhardt. The open-concept living space showcase's Friedemann's belief in style being a combination of good taste.





CLOCKWISE: Friedemann in his award-winning kitchen, which combines natural elements to create a warm and inviting room. Luna benefits from the comfortable living space. Friedemann Weinhardt's good taste and style come naturally to the man dedicated to good design.



The front entry showcases more evidence of creative inspirations with eclectic forms of artwork, including an intriguing boxed-framed photograph of multiple galaxies. All the pieces come together to establish a stylish, open-concept space that is well suited to the tastes of a man not afraid to reveal himself through his furnishings. His diverse collections are expressive of someone with strength, confidence and a sense for good design.

**What is your background?** It is eclectic. I was born in Germany, but grew up in southern Ontario. When I finished high school, I worked as a draftsman. The work was very technical and gave me a good start, although it didn't nurture my creative side. I went on to work in numerous areas from construction to retail, but was always trying to find the right place to channel my creative energy.

**How did you finally end up in the design world?** In 1979 I moved to Ottawa and was really motivated to get creative, so I started designing furniture. I made everything from beds to birdcages and sold them at the Stittsville flea market. My business at that time was called Freedom Furniture. The name reflected my philosophy that if I stayed true to my calling to be creative, I would stay free of working for a living!

**How did Design First get established?** I worked as a sales rep for an appliance company and was exposed to the kitchen industry and the designers. I was drawn to the drawing aspect of design and started to do some designing. A client who saw my work was impressed and offered me a job in his store, Van Leeuwen, a local furniture store known for good quality, contemporary furnishings. It was a great place to work and really got me started. Two years later, in 1986, I started Design First. I had little money, but plenty of courage and determination which helped us grow into the business you see today.

**What is Design First Interiors today?** We are a full-service interior design and interior architectural firm. The name derives from my belief in the need for every job to have the right design. If the design isn't right, nothing else matters. I strive to find the perfect design for every job I do. The design comes first and after that comes the look and style.

**Define style?** I am not sure how to answer that. I believe that style is the combination of good taste. I also believe that there are re-



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ally only two styles – contemporary and traditional – and perhaps we can look towards transitional which lies somewhere between the two styles.

**What constitutes good taste to you?**

That depends on the individual. Being authentic to what you like will encourage good taste. When working with clients, I strive to understand what a client is asking for and what their needs are. I do a lot of research and work hard to create their authentic style, and in the end, this pays off. I am then able to please the client and the result shows good taste!

**What style is your home?** Contemporary.

It's a Barry Hobin design, built by Uniform Developments. I designed the kitchen and bathroom and won an OCHBA award in 2002 for these rooms. My home reflects my belief in working hard to get the right design. I changed my own kitchen design several times. It was much harder to do it for myself, but I love it and only once have I had kitchen envy and that was for a project in Navan. Now that is a kitchen! (See page 22 for details of the kitchen renovation that made Friedemann a little green with envy.)



A master bedroom with a large bed covered in a patterned gold and brown duvet. A dog is lying on the floor in the foreground. The room features large windows with a view of a park and water, and a model ship on a white ledge. A lamp is on a wooden nightstand.

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you like will encourage  
good taste.

— Friedemann Weinhardt

The park and water view create an oasis within the master bedroom. **FACING PAGE:** The award-winning ensuite. Rustic and contemporary come together with style in the powder room.