

CELEBRATING THE STYLE OF SOUTH LOUISIANA

# HOUSE

July 2009 Volume XII, Issue 9

*and home*

STATELY STANDOUTS  
FROM THE BATON ROUGE  
PARADE OF HOMES

BANISH SUMMER HEAT IN  
COOL OUTDOOR KITCHENS

A CASUAL CAMP GETS  
A DESIGNER'S MAKEOVER

PRESENTING THE  
2009 DESIGN AWARDS  
WINNERS

2009  
BEST  
in CLASS



Bart Talbot has been manufacturing custom shutters and turnings, seen here, for over 18 years.

## Quality Craftsmanship, Southern Style

### Describe the services that Southern Plantation Shutters offers.

We are a complete turnkey interior and exterior shutter manufacturer. We also make custom stair parts and wood turnings.

### How did you get started in your business? How has the business grown to serve the Louisiana market?

After several years in the cabinet and millwork business, decorators and homeowners were consistently asking for interior plantation shutters. I always enjoyed working with wood so I started supplying shutters as a part-time job.

The company started about 19 years ago. Interior shutters were just getting

popular in the area, as people were leaning toward a clean look. I went from recommending painters and installers to handling the whole job in-house.

### What are some of the most common requests that customers pose when they contact you or visit your showroom?

I generally respond to numerous questions such as: how to get quotes, what materials we use, whether we install and paint the shutters and whether they are hurricane-proof. If customers have a rough estimate of the size of the project, I can usually give them a price over the phone.

In 18 years, Southern Plantation Shutters has grown from a part-time operation to the gold standard for interior and exterior shutters and turnings. Owner Bart Talbot launched his company in direct response to growing demand for plantation shutters, and now boasts a solid book of repeat customers. *House and Home* recently caught up with Bart to discover his secret for success, and to learn more about his passion for quality in every product his company manufactures.



External shutters can be used to create a frame to hide heating and cooling units or other storage areas, keeping outdoor areas clean and aesthetically appealing.

### What is a typical day like for you and your team?

I get to the shop around 7:00 a.m. A few of my employees start around 4:30 a.m. I, like many of my employees, wear many hats. I still measure and install every interior shutter I sell, along with answering the phone and quoting and ordering materials. While I am away from the shop measuring or installing a project,

my team makes sure that the orders are being processed in a productive way. If a customer wants us to install exterior shutters, I will measure them also. The day usually goes by pretty fast.

**Why do you think Southern Plantation Shutters has been so successful over the years?**

I could not have grown nor been so successful had it not been for my employees and my customers. I use my millwork background to make sure that the jobs don't look like an afterthought. I have the best craftsmen in the industry. James has been with me for 10 years, and customers are patient enough to realize that each job is custom made for them, and not ready-made.

**What are some of the most popular trends in shutters and turnings?**

As far as interior shutters, I am seeing larger windows that can handle a larger blade size. Most jobs have arched windows as well. Because of the recent storms, customers want their exterior shutters hinged so they function for protection.

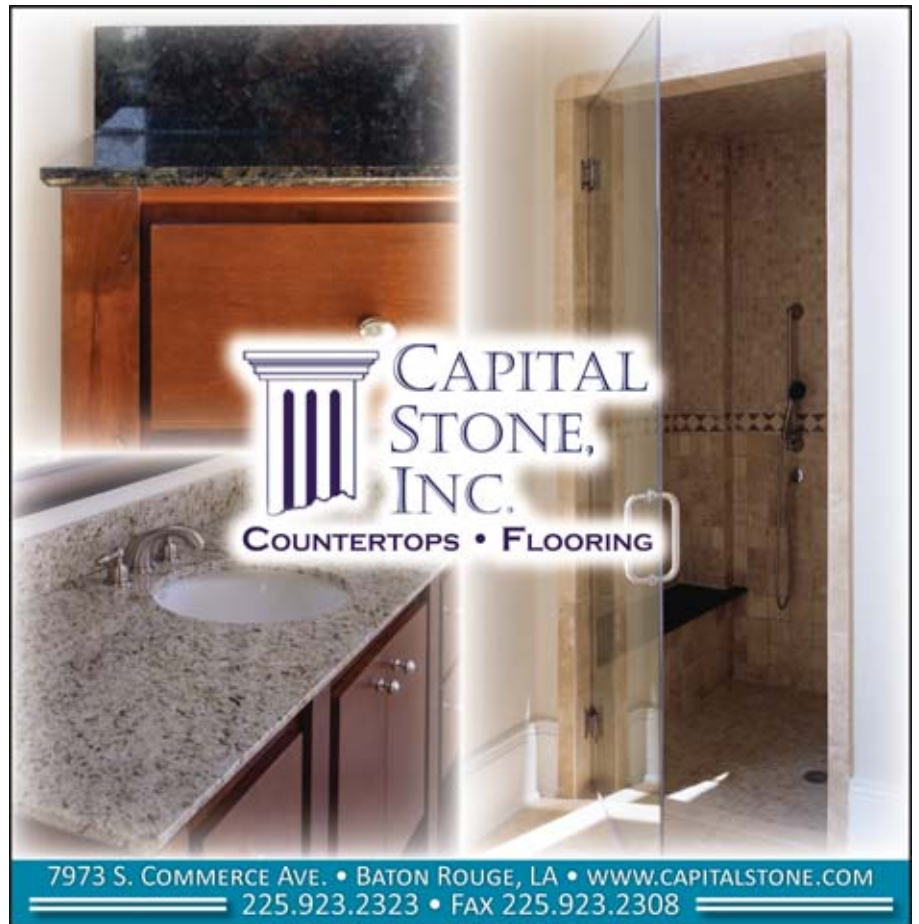
As far as turnings, we deal with custom cabinet shops that signature their work, and we use our CNC lathe to produce turnings around sinks or island legs out of the exact wood the shops use to build their customers' cabinets. We also supply custom stair parts that cannot be purchased from stock manufacturers.

**How closely do your customers' tastes reflect national trends?**

I believe Baton Rouge has its own unique trends. All of my clients want custom interior and exterior shutters. They also want turnings that they had input in designing. Baton Rougeans don't like to patronize large box stores for their custom jobs. They like to be able to talk and work with the man that is doing the measuring, pricing and installation of their job. If there is an issue, they only have to come to one guy—me.

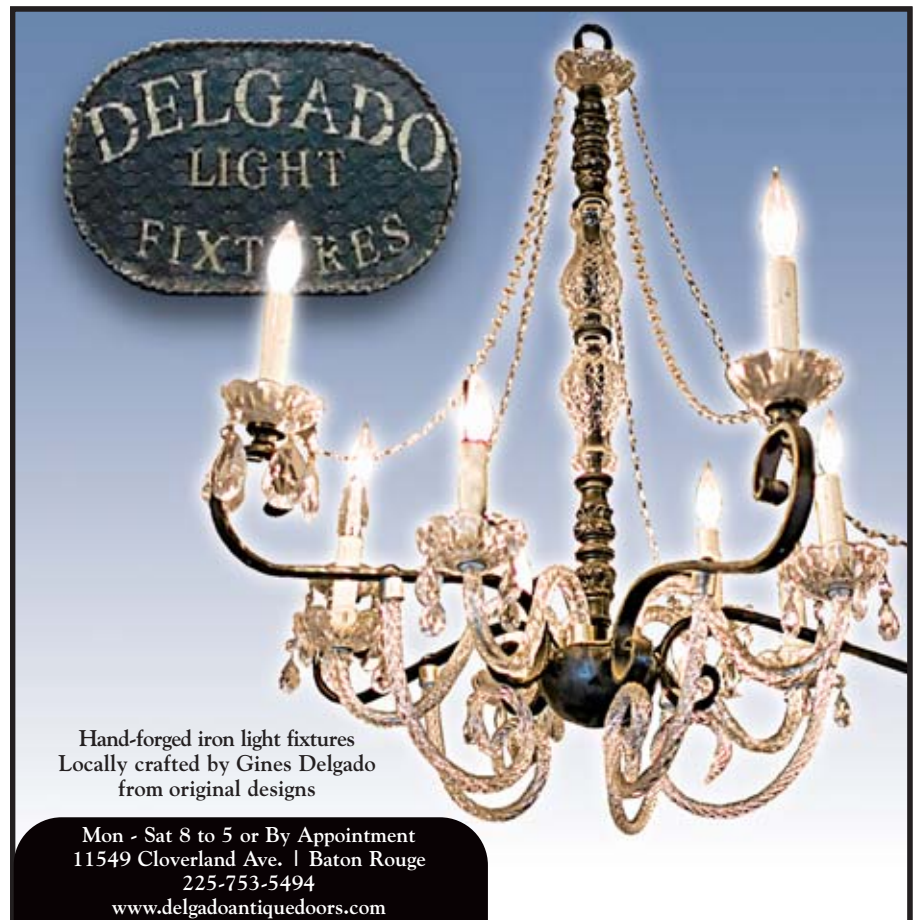
**What should homeowners know about shutters or turnings before contacting you for a project?**

Since shutters are an excellent investment, homeowners need to know that all shutters are not the same. Proper installation is very important. The interior shutters sold by many big box stores and



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Photos by Melissa Orumski

shops are made and painted in China. Mine are made in the USA with wood harvested on family-owned land and from landowners who demand sustainable forestry and responsible conservation, leaving a proud legacy for future generations. I custom paint the shutters to a homeowner's exact color, which is mixed in our own paint room. Also, the joints on all of my interior shutters have a transferable lifetime warranty.

**How much guidance do you provide customers in making decisions about shutters or turnings? How do you help customers arrive at the best choice for their homes?**

Since all of the products are custom, a tremendous amount of time is spent to make sure the customer and I are on the same page. When the quote becomes a job, I go to the home to go over the options. Computer-generated drawings have been a lot of help in aiding customers regarding the many options that are available in interior and exterior shutters or wood turnings. In other words, a picture is a million words.

**What types of shutters and turnings are in highest demand right now?**

Interior arched shutters are very popular. We are excited about the new fully functional arched shutters now available in which all of the louvers fully rotate. We are also working on more outdoor living spaces since people are increasingly choosing 'staycations,' where they enjoy their backyards, cabanas, pools, cooking centers, decks and, of course, shutters. Exterior shutters are being used to separate sections of the yard. They are installed on sliding tracks with movable or fixed louvers and are

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fixed in place or hinged. We have gotten very creative with the versatility of shutters.

#### How has your business weathered the changing economy?

Because Baton Rouge residents are proud of their homes and they are always updating them. The interior shutters pretty much sell themselves. Over approximately 18 years, I have compiled a large, satisfied customer list. The shutters offer security, privacy, insulation, cleanliness and a final covering for the window.

Homeowners are also replacing exterior shutters as they rot or have storm damage. Not only are we manufacturing new shutters for our customers, we are also offering installation with hardware and finishing. Since we have expanded our services, we have been able to combat the economic downturn so far. We have also streamlined our production so we can give homeowners a faster turnaround time.

#### What is your favorite part about working with customers and suppliers?

Having long-term customers is my favorite part of the job. Seeing the smiles on their faces is priceless. I am working on the fourth and fifth home of some customers, while others are on the fourth or fifth job in the same home. I tell my customers on the first job that the only bad thing about shutters is that they are contagious, and by the last job, the whole house has plantation shutters throughout. It is a great feeling for them to call and say, "Okay, Bart, it's time to do another room!"

I have used the same supplier of interior shutter panels for the past 18 years. They have watched and helped me grow from part-time status to one of their gold dealers.

#### What sets Southern Plantation Shutters apart from competitors?

Our customer service. We can do as little or as much as a customer wants. And, everything is done by us in-house by quality craftsmen. There is no middleman. We are a one-stop shop. In fact, we're the only shop in town that offers the complete package of shutters from start to finish.

**Southern Plantation Shutters**  
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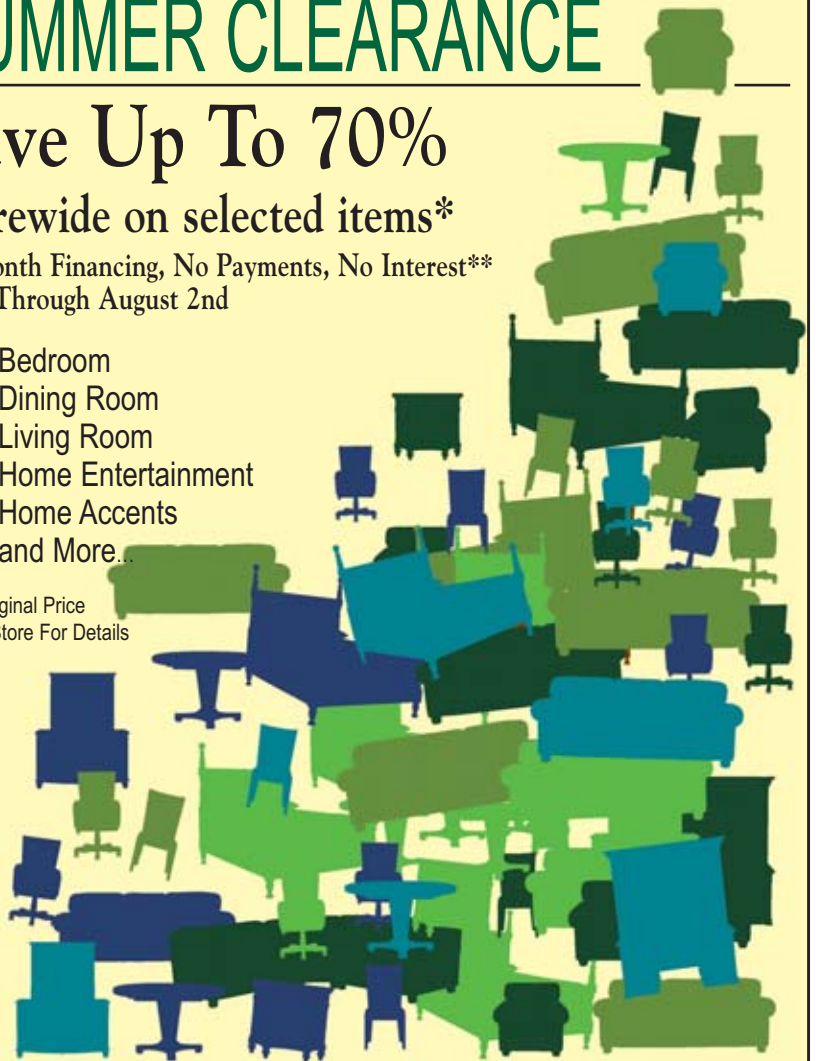
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