

# VOICES & VIEWS

Q & A: REGINA GUST

## Christmas comes early for interior designer

By Erin Mulvaney

October might seem a bit early to be talking Christmas decorations, but not for holiday interior designer Regina Gust.

Gust of Gust Designs, who has worked on holiday design since 1989, is in the spirit 12 months out of the year. Shoppers may start seeing evergreens and sparkling lights soon, even before Halloween.

Gust is now planning roughly 50 holiday displays in Houston's commercial properties. The Chronicle talked to her about her unusual job and how in a difficult time for office leasing space, the special touches during the holidays can make a difference.

something customized that doesn't look like every other building in town. Sometimes in the commercial world, everything looks the same. This is a way to make spaces more custom.

**Q: Why do companies hire you?**

**A:** The companies believe their holiday décor is an extension of their brand and a way for patrons to experience the holidays.

For example, at one property at 712 Main, I'm doing something totally historically hip and out of the box. They want their property to stand out. They want to create a good feeling and tell their tenants we went out of our way this year to stand out.

**Q: What's your process?**

**A:** The companies start calling in January and February. I'll take a team of designers and we will study the space and the traffic flow. We want to get to know the building and the culture of the company. We want to understand what they want and what will be best for their tenants. We try to understand every project, who is walking by and who they are trying to impress.

**Q: What are some of your projects or designs that stand out?**

I worked on the AIG buildings, which are five buildings with attached walkways. There was a singing reindeer that moved from lobby to lobby. One property manager said even some of the most high-maintenance tenants were complimentary and showed their appreciation. They had a serpentine sofa. It was unexpected.

Another favorite job was at the Lyric Center, which is known for its 20-foot tree. It's right there in the window.

This year will be interesting after renovations. I'm contemplating a white tree with LED moving lights.

**Q: Can you gauge if there is a return on investment in holiday décor?**

**A:** I think with more buildings popping up, there is more competition now. They are wanting someone to bring something outside the box and custom. They want something to make their space look a little different from everybody else's. It's an opportunity to attract prospective tenants to make our spaces beautiful and updated.

It's a great time to take advantage and show appreciation for the tenants. It's possibly a leasing strategy going forward. I think once managers realize the difference in the mood that can be set. It really means a lot to tenants. These people are working rather than Christmas shopping or spending time with family. It can get them into the spirit, even at the office.

**Q: How long are decorations up in the buildings?**

**A:** Everyone is wanting the decorations up earlier and earlier. The earliest I've ever seen is October, but it's becoming more common to have décor before Thanksgiving. They want it up sooner and sooner.

You'll see the wreaths at Highland Village in October and think, seriously? But once people get used to seeing it, they expect it.

They want to start off the season a little sooner. It's really hysterical. There is no fall anymore. Most places now just go from Halloween straight to Christmas.

Personally, I don't put up my tree until after Thanksgiving.

*erin.mulvaney@chron.com  
twitter.com/erinmulvaney*



Regina Gust of Gust Designs  
Annie Mulligan

### READER FEEDBACK

#### STALLING THE TRAIN

"A big thumbs down to the owner of the 440 acres of land stalling the development of the high speed train between Houston and Dallas! My guess is they don't have to make the bumper-to-bumper drive between the cities because they have access to a private plane flying in and out of smaller airports (like Sugar Land which is getting a multimillion-dollar face lift) courtesy of the average taxpayer with absolutely no use for such airports. The average Joe is stuck standing in long TSA lines, paying exorbitant airline prices, subject to random delays, cancellations and pitiful service. But hey poor landowner. — Sally Miller, Houston

#### CLEAN UP SOUTH LOOP

"It would be nice if the trashy state of the South Loop and the service roads would be cleaned up and trimmed. That area is deplorable!" — Comment on Erin Mulvaney's story about cleaning up the area around NRG Stadium for the Super Bowl

#### PERKS FOR BIGWIGS

"America tried a reparation day years ago. All the companies did was use the cash for salaries, bonuses, perks for bigwigs, increasing dividends and making more stock buy-backs. Almost none of the billions brought back were used for investment." — Comment on Chris Tomlinson piece on a plan to allow companies to bring offshore dollars home without facing steep taxation.

#### INEFFECTIVE ADS?

"Shanks is a victim of misguided ineffective advertising. They are about to conduct a clearance sale that will generate a ton of traffic in the store. Had they applied that same strategy 2 years ago, they would not be liquidating." — Comment on story about high-end furniture retailer Louis Shanks leaving Houston.

#### GOT A COMMENT?

Send your thoughts on business, financial and economic news to business editor Al Lewis @telitool or al.lewis@chron.com

### FIVE TOP STORIES

houstonchronicle.com

1. Crude oil moves above \$50
2. Bass Pro Hooks Cabela's
3. Deepwater Horizon gets mixed reviews from survivors
4. Houston's retail real estate market still expanding
5. Houston sprucing up for Super Bowl

### QUOTES

"The eyes of the world will be on Harris County and Houston during Super Bowl festivities, and it's important that we look our best and make it easier for visitors to get around. The newly improved streets will enhance the commute for people who live, work and travel along these roads for years after the game is played."

— Harris County Commissioner Gene Locke

"Retailers should read that statistic and pray it comes true."

— Houston retail analyst Jason Baker on forecast of 3.6 percent rise in holiday spending

"This year is likely to see the lowest annual growth rate for U.S. GDP since 2009 as oil sector adjustments, weak external demand and the earlier appreciation of the dollar take their toll on industrial demand."

— Brian Coulton, chief economist at Fitch

## Obama's new tack on trade treaty

Over the past few weeks, defying the anti-trade rhetoric on the campaign trail, President Barack Obama has mounted a full-court press to get a vote on a big missing piece of his legacy: The Trans-Pacific Partnership.

The trade and investment deal with 13 Pacific Rim nations has been in progress for nearly his entire term. It's cleared a couple of congressional hurdles but hit a roadblock with the populist surge of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders, leading to Hillary Clinton's announcement that she wouldn't support the deal for which she had helped lay the groundwork.

Leaders in Congress have all but closed the door to a vote in the two short months they have to finish business after the election.

Nevertheless, Obama and his lieutenants talk it up at every chance they get, in hopes that opinions will change once the polls close.

The problem is, they're doing it with an argument that Americans may not care that much about. In earlier stages of the TPP campaign, the administration pushed its economic benefits by eliminating thousands of tariffs on U.S. goods in Asian countries, the White House argued, the deal would boost American exports, creating more jobs and higher wages. Even helping U.S. companies like Nike manufacture overseas could support design and engineering jobs at home.

Then, the economic analyses of the TPP started coming back. The U.S. International Trade Commission found that the deal would only boost economic growth by 0.15 percent and employment by 0.07 percent over 15 years. The pro-trade Peterson Institute for International Economics found that TPP might raise wages but wouldn't meaningfully change employment. More skeptical economists at Tufts University determined the deal would actually decrease employment and economic growth in the United States.

With the economic case becoming difficult to make, backers of the trade deal shifted their emphasis to a geopolitical argument: The TPP is an essential manifestation of U.S. leadership, without which southeast Asia would be drawn inexorably into China's orbit, potentially undermining U.S. national security.

*lydia.depillis@chron.com  
twitter.com/lydiadepillis*



LYDIA DEPILLIS

### PEOPLE IN BUSINESS



Tooks

**Al Tooks** has joined Garden Terrace Alzheimer's Center of Excellence in Houston as executive director.

**Stuart Showers** has joined



Showers

**H. Alex Taghi** has joined NAI Partners as vice president of office tenant representation.

**Stuart Showers** has joined



Taghi

**Jason Sanders** has been named chairman of the tax department at Briggs & Veselka. Sanders' practice focuses on corporate tax clients.

**Stuart Showers** has joined



Sanders

**Frank J. Hayes** has joined Altivia as chief financial officer. Altivia is a privately held petrochemical company based in Houston.

**Stuart Showers** has joined



Hayes

has joined ACS Steel Co. as vice president of sales and marketing.

**Stuart Showers** has joined



Goad

**Marla Van Overbeke** has joined the relocation division of Weichert.

**Stuart Showers** has joined



Van Overbeke

**Wayne Murray** Properties as the company's destination services relocation specialist.

**Stuart Showers** has joined



Washburn

**Karri Washburn** to represent home buyers and sellers throughout southwest Houston.

**Stuart Showers** has joined

The Chronicle lists appointments to executive-level positions in Houston. Send announcements to [katherine.feser@chron.com](mailto:katherine.feser@chron.com).