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An Award-Winning Architect's Oasis

CREATING CALM IN THE MIDDLE OF GEORGETOWN

WRITTEN BY TRISH DONNALLY | PHOTOGRAPHY BY TASS MIMIKOS



Entry Area

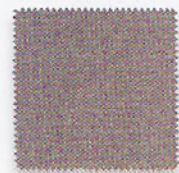
The intersection of M Street and 31st is one of the busiest in Georgetown. But enter the second floor office of Architect Ernesto Santalla, which is at this corner, and you'll find calm quarters. This open, tranquil space, awash in natural light from large windows on two sides, 12-foot ceilings, bookcases lining one wall, and a neutral color scheme is spiced with warm orange accents.

"It's very important to me that whoever comes in this office feels comfortable. Working with design professionals can be intimidating, so I want to do everything I can to put people at ease," says Santalla, who recently won an Award of Merit in Interior Architecture from the Washington Chapter of the American Institute of Architects for the design of his office.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Ernesto Santalla's studio in Georgetown features artwork by Choco.



Pillow
Donghia
Palazzo taffeta
Kumquat



Pillow
Donghia
Palazzo taffeta
Cato



Meeting Area



Foyer bench
cushion
Pollack Vinyl
Lust 9902/01
Fudge



Meeting room chairs
Pollack Vinyl
Lust 9902/01
Buff

An unexpected mix of furnishings throughout Studio Santalla span from custom pieces that he designed and chairs ordered through the Design Within Reach catalog to finds from IKEA, Home Expo, and Hold Everything.

"We practice that in our projects as well. It's where can you get the best value for what you need and it's how everything comes together

that's important. It's not so much the individual pieces," Santalla says.

While the floor plan of this former bookstore is open, different design elements distinguish different parts of the office, specifically the entry, meeting area, and workstations. Santalla's custom carpet design pulls it all together.



Photograph by Daniel Norman

Architect Ernesto Santalla

The bookcase closures are finished with back-painted Plexiglas. Full-length mirrors from Crate & Barrel reflect light from the windows opposite.

A WELCOMING ARRIVAL

A custom bookcase and bench that Santalla designed, a John Saladino glass and aluminum coffee table, two black Eames chairs, and a work of art called *Fat Red Lips* by Cuban artist Choco greet you in the entry area.

Santalla selected ash wood because of the grain for the simple bookcase and bench, then stained them both espresso brown. "If you don't have texture in the wood and you stain it or paint it, it becomes very bland," he says. The whole piece beautifully frames Choco's artwork.

"Since I'm Cuban, I was very excited to meet a Cuban artist. It struck me when I met him that I don't know people who have lived in Cuba, I only know people who have left Cuba. I'm very proud to have that in my office," says Santalla, 45, who fled Cuba with his family when he was two-years-old. After living in St. Louis, MO and later San Juan, Puerto Rico, then graduating from Cornell University, Santalla settled in Washington, where he has worked for more than 20 years. He established Studio Santalla in December 2000.

A PLACE TO MEET

The meeting area in Santalla's office includes an ash and aluminum credenza that he custom designed, a white club chair by Michael Vanderbyl for Baker, and a sleek, contemporary aluminum table and six polypropylene and aluminum framed chairs from Design Within Reach. Floatation, a dramatic triple-tiered white paper fixture by Ingo Maurer, gently lights the area.

Most of the light in the office comes from low voltage track lighting. "You can have a beautiful space, but if it's not well

lit, it doesn't work," he says. "There's nothing like low voltage lighting. The beauty of color in low voltage lighting is amazing."

WORKSTATIONS

Three large white oak partners' desks that Santalla designed march along one window-lined wall. Santalla bought the computer desks that are perpendicular to the partners' desks at Crate & Barrel. The desk accessories are from Hold Everything, IKEA, and Staples. Santalla's nearby custom designed desk is tucked into an alcove formed by the bookcases.

The architect created two dramatic tables, pictured above, using copper planters from Smith & Hawken for which he had oak tops and bases made. The carpet, manufactured by Masland, is broadloom that Santalla had pieced together to highlight different details in his office. White rectangles in the carpet, for instance, continue the line of the bookcases, windows, and workstations onto the floor. The carpet design connects the space.

Framed black and white photos that Santalla has taken reflect his travels. Just as he focuses on light, shadow, form, and texture for his photography, so has he done for his studio. He and his two associate architects find their work space quiet and inspiring. Santalla says, "It's really conducive to a lot of creative energy." **ws**

RESOURCE

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