

INSIDER



EMILY J. FOLLOWILL

Q&A: JAMES FARMER

Table TITAN

Georgia native and lifestyle virtuoso James Farmer describes his aesthetic as “unapologetically Southern.”

“Whether in design, cooking, day-to-day life, or entertaining, I hope my Southern roots are always reflected,” says Farmer, whose popular books range from *A Time to Plant: Southern-Style Garden Living* in 2011 to his most recent title, *A Place to Call Home: Timeless Southern Charm*. “I may serve Lay’s potato chips at a dinner party, but I’d probably serve them out of a Waterford dish with a sterling scoop! I love to mix time periods and styles, which is what I believe makes life or a design unique and cherished.”

The affable designer—think Martha Stewart with a drawl—will speak March 11 at **Naples Tables**, a luncheon of lavish place settings and such, to benefit The League Club’s Community Trust Fund. More than 600 guests are expected at The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort, which will showcase tables created by designers, florists, event planners, and other



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local businesses.

When asked what special touches he uses to make a client’s home feel special, Farmer replies with a laugh: “Their checkbook.”

Known for his sense of humor as well as his sense of style, the author says the event’s theme celebrating style, food, and fun reflects “all the things I live and breathe.”

For more of those things, plus his favorite fast-food restaurant in his hometown of Perry (about 100 miles south of Atlanta), turn the page for our Q&A. (leagueclub.org)—Loretta Grantham



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How does your upbringing influence your style?

I was born and raised in the same town where I still live, so childhood and adulthood aren't that different. I'm still eating at the same Chick-fil-A, but now we have a Publix! I grew up on a farm, which made me hyperaware of the seasons and the importance of bringing the outdoors in. Because of this, I love to fill a beautifully appointed room with fresh blossoms from the magnolia tree outside or fresh pomegranates from the grocery store in order to bring natural elements into a home.

Who was your greatest inspiration?

No doubt, architect Frank McCall when it comes to design. But with cooking and entertaining, it would certainly be my grandmother, Mimi. I was standing in the kitchen as a young child, and she put me to work. Guess who got a hot biscuit before the other kids playing outside! Here I am four and a half-ish cookbooks later.

What are the most important elements in interior design?

Classic comfortability and my signature style of tradition with a twist melded together to form some type of harmony and balance. High and low, new and old—whatever it is that ultimately helps to make a client's home a home. Home is an important word, and I think our clients appreciate fine homes that are chic and stylish but still comfortable and welcoming.

How do you see your brand growing?

We currently have projects that reach much farther than Georgia, so we look forward to continuing to expand our reach. I've found that roots and wings are the key to life, so it's very exciting to work in my hometown but have clients in Connecticut, St. Louis, and beyond. My team is talented and hardworking, and we are very blessed to be where we are today. We look forward to new projects, new books, and new opportunities that come our way, whatever they may be.

"WHEN YOU CHANNEL A CLIENT'S PERSONALITY AND AFFINITY FOR CERTAIN OBJECTS, IT COMES THROUGH IN THE AESTHETIC OF THE PROJECT," FARMER SAYS.



Table TITAN

Continued

NI: How did you get involved with entertaining and interior design?

Farmer: I grew up in a family that entertains often, so learning to throw a party was handed down to me. My grandmother instilled in me that we eat first with our eyes, and that we feed people—body and soul—when they are at our table. I still live by those mantras today. Depending on how far back we want to go, I first started a business called Leaf it to Me when I was about 14 and was limited to a golf cart for transportation. I put flyers in my neighbors' mailboxes and planted mums, decorated mantels, put out pumpkins. Anything they needed, they could leaf it to me!

I studied art history and landscape design at Auburn University, so during college and in my 20s, I helped friends, family, and clients with weddings, flowers, and other events. As I moved toward interior design, my first clients were all relatives, so maybe they felt like they had to use me! Word of mouth proved to be the best advertisement as I began to grow my business. I think many of the aesthetics we strive to achieve with interiors can also be mimicked at an event or gathering. Entertaining and interior design share commonalities because the details are what make them personal and special.

