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Friday, January 18, 2008

Dennis Duffy

Driven by design

Boston Business Journal - by [Michelle Hillman](#) Journal staff

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Dennis Duffy describes himself as a "stressed-out Virgo" who always did what he was told, that is until the 1980s when he decided to pursue interior design instead of a medical degree. The Florida native opened his own studio in New York City, called Duffy Design Limited, which he ran from 1989 until 1996 before he came to Boston to work for interior designer Celeste Cooper. Duffy recently spoke to Boston Business Journal reporter Michelle Hillman about his most challenging projects, what inspires him and why the word "recession" makes his skin crawl.



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Who is the most famous person you've ever designed for?

(Red Sox left fielder) Manny Ramirez. He was overwhelmed. All of a sudden he had this incredible apartment at the top of the Ritz but he had no clue what he wanted it to look like.

Most challenging space you've designed?

Rocca Kitchen & Bar. The challenge was to take all of these requirements within a space that was completely less than raw -- it was a pit -- and be able to reconcile all of that.

Inspiration?

I get it from my clients. I'm able to get them and understand the message. It's an empathy that you either have or you don't. The other thing that inspires me, this is going to sound so corny, is nature.

Definition of a good day?

A successful presentation. A successful installation. A happy client. Just overall a feeling of accomplishment.

Traits that give you a competitive edge?

I'm very personally driven, not aggressive to other people, just aggressive to myself. I'm a perfectionist, sometimes hypercritical both inward and outward. I'm very critical of things until I feel they're right. I won't quit until I feel it's perfect. And I'm very curious. Some of those are double-edged swords -- they have good sides and bad sides to them, but by and large they're good.

Scariest moment?

When the recession hit New York in 1991, I had no clue. I didn't know anything about marketing. ... I had to close the office eventually. I couldn't even get a job. So every time I hear the word recession my skin just crawls off my back.

Three greatest passions (in no particular order)?

The ocean, music and design.

Person most interested in meeting?

The Dalai Lama.

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Favorite restaurant?
Clio.

Motto?

From a design standpoint, I'd hate to be limited by something like that. For a personal motto, treat others with the same kindness you want to be treated with.

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