



# Eastgate

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Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Shallow men believe in luck or in circumstance. Strong men believe in cause and effect." Rex Elsass is a strong and purposeful man who emerged from humble roots in Mansfield, Ohio to build one of the most powerful and influential political strategy and advertising agencies in the country. He has coached some of the biggest names in politics for television interviews, and his production team creates multimillion dollar ad campaigns - winning hundreds of awards for their work. Was there a little luck along the way? Probably. But, like most success stories, Rex seems to have the gift of clarity - knowing when to grab for the gold ring and when to hang on for the ride.

It can be the smallest of moments that offers the gold ring - a seemingly inconsequential action or decision, but one that leads to impressive results. When Rex Elsass spent a day in 2010 reviewing sites for a new company retreat in Washington D.C. with his New Albany - based interior designer, Mark Huffman, they nearly cut the day short after finding a home that fit their criteria. With one house remaining on the list, the duo decided to quickly view it before catching their flight home "just in case." That "just in case" tour has become the perfect backdrop for important strategic meetings with clients and special events boasting a veritable "Who's Who" on the political scene - with some serious cause and effect from everyone involved.





"Rex walked in the front door and knew it was the one. He made the offer on the way to the airport, and our team got right to work. We had an aggressive timeline," remembers Huffman. The deadline was a party for 300 in twelve short weeks, and despite recent upgrades, the home had to be gutted to meet Rex's discriminating standards. "We finished on the day of the party," Huffman smiles.

"I hire the best talent I can find and get out of their way," says Rex at our breakfast meeting. Meetings with Rex, or any other member of his leadership team, always occur over meals I later learn. "Mark is a gifted designer. He understands exactly what I need - and he infuses each space with our culture and style." Having designed multiple homes and offices for Rex in 13 years, Huffman had the clarity, vision and the team to get the job done.

Dubbed "Eastgate" for the East Gate of Jerusalem (reflective of Rex's deep faith), the D.C. home became a hive of activity

emanating from our very own capital city - Columbus, Ohio. General contractor Marc Miriello of On Site Management relied on trusted central Ohio resources, housing a team in nearby corporate accommodations for the duration of the project.

Built in 1892, Eastgate was home to Steubenville, Ohio sculptor William McCauslen. Having sculpted the likes of John Tyler, William King and Andrew Johnson, McCauslen surely entertained important political leaders of his day in the stately row house. Well-positioned, just seven blocks from the Capitol in a tony neighborhood, the home had become a two-unit townhouse in recent years. When another distinguished Buckeye seized the opportunity to return Eastgate to its former glory, it was only appropriate that he should employ the efforts of the best Ohio has to offer.

Leather upholstered wall panels were sized and prepared by Fortner Upholstering in Columbus and shipped to D.C. for







installation by Miriello's carpenters. Tiles and slabs were sourced through Classico Tile on 3rd Avenue and installed by Authentic Tile and Marble from Sunbury. Beautiful hardwood floors were provided by Old West Woods, a company from Wynesfield, Ohio, who once produced and installed the set for a Meryl Streep film.

Contractors weren't limited to central Ohio. Huffman called on Brooklyn-based artist, Alan Carroll, who applied silver leaf by hand, burnishing it to a perfect patina; and painstakingly brushed hand-striated walls to provide a texturally rich backdrop for restrained and modern furnishings. Custom furniture was ordered, including pieces from Washington D.C. designer, Thomas Pheasant - an international force in the design world who recently styled the interiors of Blair House, the President's guest house on Pennsylvania Avenue across from the White House.

After the renovation, little remained besides the home's original elements: a fireplace mantel, the stair railing and balusters. "We had to be recreate a lot of trim and architectural details," says Huffman. "Given the custom furniture orders alone, it is remarkable we made the deadline - but that's the beauty of working with our Columbus team. When these people commit, they are dedicated and just get it done."

The culmination of the team's efforts is a space that is serene and sophisticated, welcoming but grand. Rex prefers to infuse food and drink into work, so Eastgate was designed with entertaining in mind. From the private and elegant formal dining room to the comfortable and chic garden level lounge, breakfast, lunch, dinner and dessert become opportunities to relax and connect more deeply with clients and colleagues. Overnight guests are treated to luxurious accommodations on the second floor. Audio visual systems are state of the art, and while the home boasts an impressive number of televisions in every room, one never feels at the center of a media empire.

At breakfast with Rex, his ability to guide the conversation effortlessly - from friendly small world banter, to his commitment to his faith and country, to his love of family - was impressive and underscored his company's mealtime / meeting strategy. Put your guest at ease. Create a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere. Attack your work with a positive and determined attitude. Get the job done. Leaving nothing to chance, Rex and his team (whether political power brokers or design aficionados) have mastered the art of cause and effect - their efforts skillfully on display to all who enter Eastgate. ■