

ALVIN CLAYTON AND THE POWER OF PAINT

by KATHERINE MIKKELSON



Alvin Clayton is charming, articulate and quite handsome, if we do say so ourselves. The former model's face has appeared in *Esquire*, *Vogue* and *GQ*, but his most recent endeavor took him off the page and into the kitchen. Last year, Alvin Clayton, the owner of the popular Alvin & Friends Restaurant in New Rochelle, N.Y., shepherded his restaurant's move to a new location. The business decision allowed the restaurant to double in size, providing space for private parties and alfresco dining. But the spring 2013 relocation was not without its tests. The build-out took much longer than expected, taxing the life he shared with his wife and children. Once finished, the restaurant came in well over budget. Clayton found himself with a larger mortgage, more employees to manage and a bigger space to fill, which required him to expand his client base. He sought solace from the stress of it all in his studio. "Painting is my stress relief," he says. "I'm almost in a Zen-like zone when I paint. I paint things that make me happy, and I get lost in the colors."

Clayton has created a painting studio in every home he has owned, and describes his current studio as a space of comfort. To unwind, he squeezes in painting sessions whenever he can find the time—sometimes late at night after he gets home from the restaurant, sometimes over coffee in the morning and always on Monday (his day off).

Clayton's bright, beautiful paintings are inspired by Henri Matisse, whose work he fell in love with during the time he spent in Paris as a model. His own painting hobby, however, was somewhat accidental: In 1989, he bought painting supplies for a friend's birthday. When she didn't touch them after several weeks, Clayton decided to give them a try. "Sometimes the

universe leads us where we least expect," he says. "I feel lucky here, where the universe has led me."

As a self-taught artist, he has experienced remarkable success. Not only does he create paintings that add to the warm, inviting atmosphere of his restaurant, but Clayton has also had several solo shows. His work has appeared in the Smithsonian, and he has sold his pieces to the likes of Denzel Washington and Halle Berry. As a business owner, husband and father, Clayton is conscious of his need to find a constructive way to leave his worries and work at the door. The power of paint has provided him stability through stressful times, and continues to play an integral part in his well-balanced way of life. "I can't be everything to everyone and I can't control everything," he says. "When I'm painting, it's the one time that I'm in control." Alvin & Friends is located at 14 Memorial Highway, New Rochelle, NY 10801. ■



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