



FAMILY REUNION

Bentley's Vice President of Design
Todd van der Kruik drives his gaggle
halfway across the country in the
name of new beginnings.

The Western Edge Collection is part of a new initiative by Bentley Mills to release a new product each month, which they've accomplished since June. Featured here is Dry Lake in Swagger colorway.

Two kids, two cats, a dog and an SUV. No, we're not setting the stage for a perfectly choreographed sitcom, we're describing the scene that Todd van der Kruik and his wife, Meg, were just crazy enough to make a reality a year ago when they decided to drive from Atlanta to California to join Bentley at its City of Industry headquarters.

It would be a homecoming of sorts for van der Kruik. He had left the company, then Bentley Prince Street, in 2007 to take a job with Milliken, where he founded their solution-dyed carpets program. It wasn't until late 2012 that van der Kruik decided to return to Bentley as vice president of design, motivated by the challenge of reinventing the well-known contract brand—and he wasn't the only one.

"One of the cool things about what's happened is all the people that used to work for Bentley at one point in their careers that have come back," van der Kruik says. "From executive management to people on the floor to the design studio to marketing, they were all past employees who really loved the company and wanted to be part of the change."

"It doesn't happen very often that a company sort of resets itself and starts over, which is really what we've done," he adds. "The opportunity and the potential was so exciting to me that [my family] just said, 'We have to go try this.' We love California, so it was an easy decision to make."

Earlier this year, Bentley revealed its new identity, which focuses on craftsmanship, its history of innovation and its roots as a Los Angeles-based manufacturer. The company rolled out their reinvention via a striking advertising campaign in June of this year that featured stylized photography of iconic L.A. architecture.

"That's what the focus is: rebuilding the basics of Bentley," van der Kruik says. "Our new foundation, in terms of product, focuses a lot on ... creating scaled textures."

Rebuilding the basics for such a big brand would be a tall challenge for any team, but it's one that van der Kruik and his colleagues have attacked with gusto. Since June, they have

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PROFILE



The line is inspired by the photographs van der Kruik took on his cross-country journey to rejoin Bentley.



launched a new product every month, compressing the typically year-long product cycle down to just a few weeks for each piece.

It's a nearly superhuman feat matched only by that epic road trip to California, accompanied by two kids, two cats and dog (which, perhaps not coincidentally, provided the inspiration for the Savage Journey pattern in the Western Edge collection).

"The timing of the move was spring into summer and the airlines said they couldn't guarantee they'd be able to fly because of the heat," van der Kruik recalls. "So we were like, 'OK, we'll just pile in the car and see what happens.'"

"It was quite an adventure," he adds.

With a two-year-old child aboard, they needed to stop often. "We would get the Garmin out and kind of watch things coming up as we were driving. If we saw something cool, we'd just stop, take a break, take pictures—just try to have the experience of being on the road rather than just watching everything go by."

Landmarks included the birthplace of Elvis

Presley in Tulepo, Miss. and the Cadillac Ranch in Amarillo, Texas, which is where van der Kruik says his creative juices really got flowing. "That's when I started really paying attention to color in the desert." They then drove through the Painted Desert in Arizona and Santa Fe, New Mexico, which he calls a highlight to the trip.


Although photography has been just a hobby for van der Kruik, the photos he took along that long drive ended up spawning the entire Western Edge collection.

"We wanted to show the authentic inspiration for the product," he said. "And it really came from that trip, that experience, so we wanted to share that with people." Bentley printed a coffee table book of van der Kruik's photos, which was on display at NeoCon and turned into an important sales tool for reps both at the show and on the road.

Van der Kruik translated the photography into carpet by examining textures such as the dried river beds and tumbleweeds they'd see. "I photographed a lot of old doors and outdoor wooden pieces in the desert," he explains. "You can see where the weather really changed the color or faded it in a way. It exposed some of the natural qualities of the wood. That became the inspiration for one of the products called Hitchhiker." The images showed him how to create a foundation of neutral color with that natural texture, and then make it pop with bright accents. "Which is kind of what you see in a desert," he adds. "Everything is brown and dusty, but the purples, turquoise and reds bring it alive."

He is no stranger to color, as a graduate of the University of California at Irvine with a degree in studio art. "Art and sculpture was my plan. Then I got out of school and realized nobody's really hiring sculptors. So it was time for plan B." He says when he landed a job as a carpet designer, he fell in love with it.

"I didn't know that job existed. I didn't know there were people who designed carpet. I didn't know that was an option, but I really liked it so I stayed with it."

Besides his work with major carpet manufacturers, van der Kruik and his wife founded Union Eighteen in 2007, a company that creates "raw rugs" made up of salvaged carpet mill scraps. That side business circles back to what matters most to him: family. Whether it's his own, or the one at Bentley he returned to, he draws true happiness from those dearest to him. "That business makes me really happy," he gushed. "If [Meg] and I can sit and design something together, well, that's the best day. But being able to design for a living in general—to have an idea and see it come to life on an everyday basis—to me that's incredibly satisfying." 



Salt Creek (field pattern), Hitchhiker (accent pattern), both in Swagger colorway



Salt Creek in Swagger (field colorway), Hunter S. Tan (light accent colorway) and Conspiracy Theory (dark accent colorway)



Hitchhiker in Scorpion Queen colorway

 Head online to watch a video detailing the inspirations behind the Western Edge collection at interiorsandsources.com/media.aspx.

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