



Happy Chair BY LAUREN EBERLE

I've always had a thing for chairs," says Shawna Robinson. "Some people love shoes — I love chairs." A household name among NASCAR enthusiasts, Robinson's storied racing history dates back 20 years. But it's her latest business, Happy Chair, that's now turning North Carolina heads.

Born into a racing legacy, Robinson says she always considered herself artsy, thanks to her mother's creative drive.

"When I was pregnant with my son, I started designing, painting, and helping friends fluff their homes," she recalls. "At that time, decorating filled the gap while I wasn't racing."

When she hung up her helmet in 2005,

Robinson dove headfirst into raising her teenage children and driving her design business.

From her studio in Matthews, the entrepreneur brings new life and beauty to well-worn pieces. Robinson combines funky fabrics and fun embellishments to create one-of-a-kind whimsical works of art.

"When I am working on a chair the per-

sonality slowly starts to emerge," Robinson says. "By the time I am done it is obvious to me what his or her name must be." The result is Trisa, Barbie, Coco, Betty, and Marilyn, or even the more masculine and lanky Grayson and Bogart.

Robinson's bohemian style translates well into prized custom pieces. Recent clients have requested chairs upholstered in their husband's shirt collection and their daughter's childhood dresses. Others bring in a rug or pillow or piece of artwork as inspiration.

Her creativity extends beyond chairs, too. Sofas, lampshades, T-shirts (labeled Happy TV), and other accessories are available on Robinson's Etsy site, as well as at select boutiques in the Charlotte area. She says she also hopes to branch out into bedding and window treatments, too.

"Racing is what brought me to North Carolina," says Robinson, who notes how fortunate she is to be living in the heart of the furniture industry. "But I truly feel that I'm doing what I'm meant to be doing at this time in my life. I'm flying by the seat of my pants — but I'm loving every second."

For more information about Happy Chair, visit www.shawnaerobinson.com or shop.happychair.com.

