

# Tony Bradfield

## 40 UNDER 40

### SAN ANTONIO'S RISING STARS

WEEK OF DECEMBER 13, 2002

When Anthony “Tony” Bradfield was growing up, his family moved from city to city, mostly living in urban areas. It was those experiences that first sparked his interest in downtown living. It offered him a vision he is now making a reality as he pursues building renovations in San Antonio’s central business district. “I didn’t grow up with grass under my feet,” he says. “I had to walk to it.” Bradfield was born in Perth, Australia — a city he describes as being “very similar to Austin, except that you have the coast.” He spent the first 17 years of his life living in Europe — mostly in Italy. He also spent a couple of years in Southeast Asia and Singapore. Growing up in these countries gave Bradfield an early exposure to urban living. “It gave me a very open-minded view about most everything,” says Bradfield of his upbringing abroad. “People tell me I’m pretty accepting and easygoing — but I’m maybe a little more intolerant of intolerable people.” Since starting The Revel Group in 1994, Bradfield has been focusing his urban efforts on rehabbing buildings in downtown San Antonio for both residential and commercial use.

In 2000, Bradfield began operating his business under the name The Downtown Real Estate Co. (DTRE). “Obviously, that’s the focus of our business,” says Bradfield of the name change. Bradfield’s interest in real estate, however, goes back to about 1988, when he bought a 120,000-square-foot antique center in Houston. And his interest in real estate, he says, came from his work in the jewelry business. Having leased space in different antique malls to show his wares, Bradfield believed he could, by serving as landlord, create a center that would be competitive with other malls by giving dealers a more efficient place to do business. The center was quickly successful. Eight months after opening, however, Bradfield faced a formidable challenge— an intense Houston rain left his center under four inches of water. It was then, Bradfield says, that he realized he needed to diversify.

In 1993, he opened the Center of Antiques in San Antonio. Today, the project is part of a larger retail space that Bradfield owns at Loop 410 and Broadway on the city’s North Side, the Airport Convention Center. Of starting a retail venture in the Alamo City, Bradfield says he quickly realized just how different doing business here can be. “Whether you’re opening a restaurant, a nightclub or a gas station, the plan is always to go to Houston and Dallas first,” he says. “They’re deep markets for almost every industry; they’re similar in nature. “You come (to San Antonio) and you try to use that same business model, and it’s completely wrong,” Bradfield continues. “It’s a different market, different economic and cultural base.” Still, it is a city that he is proud to call home. Bradfield has now lived in San Antonio for 10 years — the longest he’s been in any city, he says. Today The Downtown Real Estate Co. owns over 30 buildings downtown. That portfolio includes the Gibbs Building where his firm offices — “since 1905, it has never been taken out of service; it’s one of the most unique buildings in San Antonio.”

He also owns the commercial building at 115 Broadway — a purchase he first made back in 1993. Indeed, it was the first building he ever bought in San Antonio. “It was ego,” Bradfield quips about the buy. “I had a little wad of cash (from selling the antique store in Houston). I was interested in real estate, and I wanted that building — it looks like a mini superior court building.” Besides DTRE, Bradfield still has his jewelry business, now known as Charles Anthony Jewelers. “It’s my name reversed,” he explains, “my sister (Monica Lacombe) thought of it.” “I probably have one of the worst cases of attention deficit disorder — I haven’t actually been diagnosed, I’m kind of afraid to,” Bradfield quips, talking about the value of the jewelry business. “It gives me a balance. There’s an immediate sense of satisfaction: you buy today, and sell to someone tomorrow.

Real estate requires a longer-term focus.” Of his longer-term venture, DTRE, Bradfield says that he would like to bring more residential projects to downtown San Antonio. “We’ve gone through puberty,” he says. “As we mature, I would like to do residential development on a larger scale.” But whether he’s working on jewelry or commercial real estate, Bradfield has learned one very important lesson: you have to respect the inherent uniqueness of an original. “There’s aspects of an old building that you can never change,” he says. “It’s about adding to someone else’s vision. Like a piece of jewelry, you have to see that it has something to offer. If I wanted to create something of my vision, I’d build something new.”

**Position:** CEO, owner  
**Age:** 32  
**Family:** Single  
**Education:** Sealy High School  
**Personal notes**  
**Word that best describes you:** Determined  
**Sage-like advice:** After living around the world, I’ve learned that America is as level a playing field as it gets. The majority of your success comes from hard work, a little luck.  
**CD your listening to:** Edith Piaf, one of my mother’s favorite singers  
**Vehicle you drive to work:** I walk. It’s one of the advantages of living and working downtown.