

BUILT TO LAST

A thoughtful renovation honors a dwelling designed and constructed by a revered Seattle architect more than a half-century ago.

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Interior Design: Christy Yaden, Christy Yaden Interior Design



Designer Christy Yaden played to the original slatted walls and brick floors laid by architect Gene Zema with a walnut console and aged-brass mirror, both by Rejuvenation. An earth-tone vessel softens the entry.

In his time, legendary Seattle architect Gene Zema was known for interpreting modernism through the lens of Pacific Northwest landscapes and materials. So, it's no surprise that the Laurelhurst home he designed for his family in 1964 contains

hallmarks of his style: an extensive use of wood, rooms centered around the views, and interiors that embrace geometric lines and a Japanese aesthetic. But the architect, who also championed handmade craft, took things in an even more personal direction by building much of the dwelling with his own hands. For the new owners and their long-time designer, the challenge of renovating the abode became preserving and amplifying the elements that make it special.

Although the couple had spent many years in a nearby Tudor-style residence raising their family, there were hints that they might feel more at home in a midcentury dwelling. Originally from the Midwest, they grew up with a love of Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture and modern furniture (among their prized possessions are an Eero Saarinen Tulip table and chairs that have been passed down through the wife's family). Thus, when they sold the Tudor abode to their eldest daughter and went hunting for the perfect place to live out their next chapter, the wife says she only had to walk 10 feet into the former Zema household to know that she'd discovered "the one." She and her husband were enchanted by the home's midcentury style and perfect symmetry, as well as the views of Lake Washington and Mount Rainier visible through large windows and glass doors. They quickly purchased it and asked interior designer Christy Yaden to update the dwelling.

"I had been in the architect's buildings before, as he was prolific in the area—especially on the nearby University of Washington campus," Yaden says. When the owners gave her a copy of the book *Gene Zema, Architect, Craftsman*, she became excited about the prospect of working on the house and was convinced that a "once in a lifetime opportunity" was unfolding before her. Yet when she first entered the home, she was a bit surprised, albeit pleasantly. She was accustomed to a Pacific Northwest style that makes use of

brawny forms and a rustic-industrial sensibility; by comparison, Zema's work was more delicate and Japanese. Although she had never worked on a project exactly like this before, she welcomed the challenge and turned to one of her tried-and-true strategies: Start by thinking about how people will use the dwelling.

Thus, one of the first decisions was that seating areas would focus primarily on the views. Few furnishings from the owners' previous house made it to this one, with the exception of the Saarinen dining set. Yaden says that, as midcentury icons, those pieces became the aesthetic "anchor for everything." With form and function established, Yaden worked with the owners to select a mix of vintage furnishings from the era—like an Eames lounge chair and ottoman in the living room—and new pieces sympathetic to the style, then added custom elements tailored to her clients. "One of the challenges was creating a table for the kitchen banquette," she says. The designer explored several iterations before landing on one that fits perfectly with the home's original three-sided bench while allowing the residents to easily maneuver around it.

Because the home's backdrop consists of substantial materials, such as brick flooring (laid by Zema and his family) and dark-stained woodwork, Yaden embraced hues of persimmon and green that read as neutrals when balanced with the weightier features. She also sought out artwork from the period, including a large paper-collage piece by Paul Horiuchi. "He was associated with the Northwest School, and his art was well-known during the time the house was built," she says. The designer also opted to retain a pair of Noguchi-esque paper sconces the Zemas had hung in the living room that complement the large glass doors and articulating slatted-wood panels that work like the shoji screens of traditional Japanese abodes.

Reflecting on the project, Yaden notes, "I found myself asking many times throughout the process, 'What would Gene do?' It was one of my guiding principles." The approach was one the clients appreciated. "They wanted to make sure that everything was thoughtful and right," she adds. "We all wanted to be part of this home and its history." ■



Above: A Roll & Hill chandelier hangs over the dining room's vintage table and velvet-upholstered Interior Define chairs. Artwork by Annie Meyer is paired with a midcentury Broyhill console. The original floor-to-ceiling windows and doors connect the space to an outdoor seating area.

Opposite: Above the living room's Room & Board sectional and Visual Comfort & Co. floor lamp is a vintage paper collage by artist Paul Horiuchi. An Eames chair, coffee table and walnut accent table, all by Herman Miller, complete the seating arrangement.





Above: Cedar-paneled walls, a lowered ceiling and views of Lake Washington make the window seat a cozy spot to curl up with a book. The patterned pillows crafted with fabric by Willow + West Textiles and artwork by Bui Van Hoan add color to the space.

Opposite: An inviting Minotti sofa anchors the television area. The room is rounded out with a leather-and-walnut Brdr. Petersen armchair, an Artifort footstool-turned-coffee table and a brutalist brass wall sculpture by Curtis Jeré.





Above: In the breakfast room, a custom walnut-and-metal Chadhaus pedestal table complements the original black leather banquette. Beyond are serene views of the terraced garden.

Opposite: A prior remodel paired Thermador appliances with black granite perimeter countertops and a green glass tile mosaic backsplash in the kitchen. The island is topped with stainless steel.



Above: Seating from RH's Mesa collection populates this shaded outdoor space, which serves as the perfect respite on a hot summer day. The pillow fabric was designed by Charles Eames' daughter, Lucia, and produced for Crate & Barrel.

Opposite: An alpaca Elvang throw from Room & Board and linen pillows from Pottery Barn soften the primary bedroom. The window seat has a view to Lake Washington and, on a clear day, Mount Rainier can be spotted in the distance.