

Homes & Gardens



An easy-to-ignore 1962 dwelling has been restored and updated to take away distractions from the original clean lines. *David Papazian Photography*

THE RE-REMODEL

A midcentury modern home in Southwest Portland returns to architect John Storrs' original vision

Janet Eastman *The Oregonian/OregonLive*

People can no longer knock on an unfitting front door that had been popped onto an admired architect's Pacific Northwest modern dwelling.

In its place: The dramatic double doors designed decades ago by John Storrs, a modernist renowned for his refined residential designs.

The original doors, with glass and stained brown wood, once again set the stage for this 1962 custom house that the late, celebrated architect dressed in natural Douglas fir, hemlock and other patinated and textured wood he saw as an "understandable, romantic material."

Eighteen years ago, a developer in Southwest Portland's Lynnridge neighborhood sought to update the look of the midcentury modern by adding heavy layers of cherry wood and Craftsman-style doors and features.

Cherry wood was wrapped around a post in the living room and used as a built-in buffet in the dining room as well as wide molding and a low-hanging valance in the home office area off the kitchen.

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Returning to the midcentury modern style with warm finishes and sleek furnishings, spaces feel like “so much more,” says homeowner Abby Wool Landon. “The living and dining rooms are more available and attractive to us. We enjoy them every day.” Photos by David Papazian Photography

Re-remodel: A midcentury modern home returns to its roots

FROM C1

Thick trim pieces installed above kitchen cupboards obscured Storrs’ carefully planned relationships between horizontal and vertical planes.

The dark wood not only clashed with the spare aesthetic but also the warm colors of the stone floor, green-tinted beige fir paneling and amber-hued hemlock ceilings.

Holes had been drilled into the wood-planked ceilings to accommodate canned lights and other contemporary fixtures.

And the original doors, with brass doorknobs and hardware plates inspired by Northwest native art, were buried in the basement.

The modifications took place before artist Richard Stark and attorney Abby Wool Landon bought the house.

In 2018, they hired Portland interior designer Vicki Simon to take away the distractions, reinstate the clean lines and execute upgrades that would mesh seamlessly with Storrs’ work.

“We were looking for someone who appreciated the provenance of the house,” said Landon. “We pointed out the things we didn’t like, and Vicki said, ‘Let’s see what’s underneath.’”

Without removing any original walls, rooms once again appear sweeping, un-suppressed.

Returning to the midcentury modern style with warm fin-

ishes and sleek furnishings, spaces feel like “so much more,” said Landon. “The living and dining rooms are more available and attractive to us. We enjoy them every day. They are not just a place for company.”

Another evidence of success: The Storrs house has been selected to be a stop on Restore Oregon’s home tour, which is part of the preservation organization’s fundraising Annual Mid-Century Modern Design Series May 8-9.

Connecticut-born Storrs earned a master’s of architecture degree at Yale University in 1949 and crossed the country five years later, inspired by revered architect Pietro Belluschi, who lectured at Yale about Portland’s take on modern design.

“Once here, John readily embraced and mastered the architectural language, such as the expansive use of wood and glass, of Pacific Northwest midcentury modernism in his projects,” says Belluschi’s son, architect Anthony Belluschi. “Storrs was responsible for numerous well-respected buildings including the Portland Garden Club, the Salishan Lodge on the Oregon coast and many wonderful homes.”

Over his three-decade career, Storrs also designed schools, a synagogue, wine tasting room and the Western Forestry Center at Washington Park, where giant center posts reflect the growth pattern of redwood trees.

Storrs’ focus on extending the visual space outdoors is evident in this house for his clients, a doctor and a Jantzen swim cap designer.

Here, tall windows set in deep sills and glass openings near the top of walls capture the landscaping and his carefully planned ceiling planks extend beyond exterior walls, aimed at the horizon.

During her first visit, Simon found the 2002 changes, from the front door on, starkly out of place.

“The curves on the cabinet trim had no relation to the ceiling,” she said. Under Simon’s direction, carpenter Michael Kecskemethy of GoManGo Enterprises took the cabinets apart to remove the unnecessary ornamentation and reestablish the graceful space where the walls meet the ceiling.

“The transition between wall and ceiling is now exposed all the way around the room,” Simon said.

Kecskemethy also filled in the Shaker-style framed cabinet doors to create flat fronts in the midcentury modern style. Oil-rubbed bronze knobs were replaced with black matte hardware, complementing the 1960 era’s look as well as the kitchen’s existing black granite counter.

“Other designers we talked to wanted to gut all the changes,” said Landon. “We appreciated that Vicki saw value in some of the updates.”



Visit famous midcentury modern homes on two-day tour

Janet Eastman *The Oregonian/OregonLive*

The groundbreaking architects of the Pacific Northwest modernism style are spotlighted in Restore Oregon's Annual Mid-Century Modern Design Series May 8-9, which includes a self-paced home tour, discussions and a "Mad Men"-era party with vintage cocktails.

Tour goers will be able to go inside six dwellings designed decades ago by Portland's star architects that continue to influence today's coveted open floor plans and use of native wood, rough stone and glass to achieve elegance and a strong connection to the landscape.

John Yeon's courtyard-centered 1937 Watzek House and Pietro Belluschi's revolutionary 1938 Sutor House with curved zebrawood walls, both in Portland's Southwest Hills, are the earliest examples of these renowned architects' resourcefulness, restraint and reliance on natural materials and light to harmonize with a picturesque setting.

Walter Gordon's 1953 Copenhagen House in Lake Oswego is another exemplar of simplicity and beauty on the tour.

Frank Shell's 1958 Blosser Whitehead House has two-story transparent walls in Southeast Portland. It once welcomed Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, fashion designer Emilio Pucci and the owners' other Reed College guests.

John Storrs' 1962 handsome home for a doctor and a Jantzen swim cap designer in Southwest Portland has been restored to expose the patinated and textured wood.

And a 1975 dwelling in Southwest Portland exhibits the pleasing proportions of Saul Zaik, an innovative modernist and preservation supporter who passed away on Jan. 4.

Peggy Moretti, director of the nonprofit Restore Oregon, which saves historic places around the state, says these fundraising and educational events are a chance to promote stewardship.

The home tour includes privately owned residences plus the Watzek House, which is overseen by the University of Oregon's John Yeon Center for Architecture and the Landscape.

Restore Oregon's Annual Mid-Century Modern Design Series begins Friday, May 8, with a lecture ("The Mid-Century Masters: Timeless, Marketable, Adaptable") plus a hosted reception and marketplace of local preservation and renovation goods and services 6-8:30 p.m. at the midcentury modern-inspired Jupiter hotel in Southeast Portland. Tickets are \$25 at restoreoregon.org (503-243-1923).

The series continues Saturday, May 9, with Restore Oregon's 10th self-guided, self-paced Mid-Century Modern Home Tour 10 a.m.-4 p.m. followed by the MIX:MOD after party, with vintage cocktails, appetizers and midcentury modern attire for people 21 or older at Rejuvenation's lighting and home parts flagship store in Southeast Portland.

Tickets for both the tour and party are \$50.

A \$25 ticket is needed to take the Watzek House guided tour.

The two-day Mid-Century Modern Design Series is sponsored by Portland remodeling company Arciform.

Stark, a decorative painter and muralist trained in reproducing the look of wood grain, painted over the filled ceiling gaps after the contemporary lights were removed and replaced with designer fixtures such as Portland-based Vitreluxe's blown-glass pendant lights in the hallway.

"I don't think anyone can find the fixes," said Stark, who studied the dwelling's original blueprints that he found at the University of Oregon architectural archive in Eugene.

The living room's exposed beams and tongue-and-groove hemlock ceiling glow again from natural light, as designed by Storrs and reintroduced by Simon. A sleek, elongated sofa floats in the center of the room, facing the original stone fireplace.

Simon found the well-worn Adrian Pearsall sofa at Hawthorne Vintage Modern in Southeast Portland that she had altered. The seat was shortened and raised for comfort, and the integrated wood end tables were re-proportioned to improve their function.

Craftspeople at Acanthus of North Portland and 1908 Design in Southeast Portland as well as restorer Robin Cady rebuilt the piece and upholstered it in wheat-colored raw silk by Zimmer + Rohde.

Near the front door is a hi-fi with a record player and storage for vinyl records. The custom cabinet by Alex Newman of Best Yr of Portland is supported by bronze feet. Blue vin-

tage lounge chairs from 20th Century Interiors in Southeast Portland rest on a wool carpet from Kush Rugs.

The Pearsall-inspired glass cocktail table was found on Esty. A Noguchi-esque planter came from Pomarius Nursery in Northwest Portland.

Simon selected the makers at 1908 Design to execute her design of a wall-mounted, linear fir cabinet for the dining room in place of a built-in cherry buffet.

Replacing white walls and a cherry wood valance in the office are fir boards that rise to the ceiling. A Poul Cadovius-designed wall unit of Royal System module shelves came from Look Modern in Southeast Portland.

The owners' favorite space is the breakfast room where two windows meet in a corner and frame sequoia and Douglas fir trees that were planted soon after Storrs completed the house. Landon and Stark sit at a custom mosaic glass table made by Coulee Concrete, under a George Nelson saucer pendant lamp.

Stark said Storrs was known to visit the construction site and order a window be added to draw in more natural light.

"In John Storrs' way, this house is not dark, but beautifully lit," added Landon. "It's a place to love."

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