

leap

faith

A Seattle couple entrusts a traditional home to contemporary designer Steven Hensel

By Fred Albert

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAURIE BLACK

In the living room, designer Steven Hensel mixed antique Biedermeier armchairs with deco-inspired designs and contemporary pieces, creating an inviting, eclectic setting. Sand-colored walls and putty trim provide a restful backdrop.





Steven Hensel is known for composing crisp, cosmopolitan interiors that incorporate custom furnishings and sleek steel. So when a client with a taste for art deco and Biedermeier antiques asked him to decorate her traditional 1909 home, Hensel was a bit surprised—and enormously pleased.

“I never get to do that,” explains the designer. “I love both styles, so that was very tantalizing to me.” Once he began, however, Hensel realized that antiques have their limitations. Trying to find a sofa table or corner chair that’s just the right proportion or finish can be challenging when you’re limited to pieces created 75 to 150 years ago. So Hensel decided to design new pieces, reflecting these historic styles but with a flavor decidedly his own.

“It was a leap of faith for me,” admits the client, the wife of a Fortune 500 executive who was accustomed to testing a piece of furniture before handing over her credit card. But she was so sold on Hensel’s aesthetic she decided to go along



LEFT: Linen curtains help soften the imposing arched windows. A grillwork coffee table and waffle-weave settee provide visual interest in lieu of overt pattern and color changes.

ABOVE: A floral Tibetan carpet complements a Michael Berman mahogany table in the entry hall.



DECO DESIGN: Inspired by the owners' love of art deco, Hensel designed the 10-foot-long custom dining table, maple sideboard, and fluted silver-leaf pedestal. Tufted Thomas Pheasant chairs from Baker sport nail-head trim, echoing the table's patinated bronze finish.

for the ride. "I really trusted his design sense," she says.

The Italianate-style home had already been updated by a previous owner, who preserved the leaded-glass windows and inlaid floors but painted the ornate oak columns and beams a serene shade of putty, leaving rooms whose historicism was more subliminal than assertive. That freed Hensel to do the same with his furnishings, referencing the past without overstating the connection.

In the living room, a curvaceous sofa from Michael Berman pays homage to the '30s, proffering a tantalizing backside to guests entering from the front hall. A demi-lune chest designed by Hensel echoes that era with fluted doors faced in silver leaf; an armless settee, oversized ottoman, and grillwork coffee table offer winking references to postwar modernism. The room's only true antiques, a pair of sinuous Biedermeier chairs sporting swan's-head arms, are blended with steel tables, striking an eclectic note that banishes pretense and makes the formal space feel much more approachable.

"I use this way more than I've ever used a living room," notes the client, the mother of two boys. Although initially skeptical about the abundance of steel, she was soon won over by the warm patina Hensel coaxes from the material. "I got over my whole metal aversion," she admits with a laugh.

Just in time, too, or the dining table might have been overwhelming. Ten feet long with a patinated brass top set



ABOVE: An abstract canvas by Christopher Reilly hangs above a chenille sofa in the family room; faux-leather chairs surround a McGuire table in the breakfast room beyond.

RIGHT: A Betsy Eby painting and fluted demi-lune consoles adorn one end of the living room; Nancy Corzine chairs offer a graceful counterpoint to Hensel's steel game table.





atop a trio of rolled-steel harps, this 500-pound paragon of industrial deco combines the best of past and present. Tufted Thomas Pheasant chairs and a sumptuous sapele wood sideboard offer softening notes, as does the unpretentious sisal underfoot.

Hensel avoided patterns throughout the project, preferring to let texture—fringed pillows, nubby linen drapes, a waffle-weave settee—and subtle shifts of color (ivory, beige, gray, frost blue) provide the necessary visual interest. “I wanted a palette that was serene and relatively monochromatic,” he says.

That serenity is especially evident in the master bedroom, a tranquil retreat whose low ceiling and sprawling dimensions initially proved challenging to Hensel. The designer solved the problem by floating a freestanding screen at one end of the room, creating a dressing area where none existed before and making the remaining sleeping and sitting areas feel cozier. A towering, channel-backed headboard helps draw the eye upward, adding perceived height to the ceiling.

Although the client admits Hensel took her in a more contemporary direction than she might have anticipated, she couldn't be happier with the results. “The spaces really worked out well for the way our family likes to live,” she says. “There isn't anything I would change.” ■



LEFT: A sinuous Kravet chaise skirts the fireplace in the spacious master bedroom.

ABOVE: A channel-stitched headboard helps draw the eye upward, so the ceiling appears taller.



Entry



Living Room



LIVING ROOM

Sofa – Michael Berman Limited
www.michaelbermanlimited.com
323.933.0220

Console table –
Interior Crafts
312.943.3384

Round table lamp – McGuire
www.kohlerinteriors.com
800.662.4847

Antique side chairs – Ritter Antik
www.ritterantik.com
212.673.2213

Floor lamp – Donghia
www.donghia.com
212.925.2777

Console cabinet –
Hensel Design Studios
206.728.1657

Side chairs – Nancy Corzine
www.nancycorzine.com
212.223.8340

Game table – Hensel Design Studios
206.728.1657

Coffee table –
Matthews & Parker, Ltd.
www.matthewsandparker.com

Settee – Bright Chair Company
888.524.5997

Lounge chair –
R. Jones & Associates, Inc.
www.rjones.com
214.951.0091

Side table – Hensel Design Studios
206.728.1657

Metal floor lamp – Nessen Lamps
www.nessenlighting.com
914.698.7799

Cloisonné vase and tea box –
Fabienne Jourvin
www.bigpagoda.com
877.272.4632

Art glass bowl – George Bucquet
www.georgebucquet.com
707.822.6641

ENTRY

Table – Michael Berman Limited
www.michaelbermanlimited.com
323.933.0220

Custom carpet –
Hensel Design Studios
206.728.1657

Resources



Master Bedroom

DINING ROOM

Dining table –
Hensel Design Studios
206.728.1657

Chairs – Thomas Pheasant for Baker
www.kohlerinteriors.com
800.59.BAKER

Sideboard – Hensel Design Studios
206.728.1657

Fluted pedestal – Interior Crafts
312.943.3384

FAMILY/BREAKFAST ROOM

Sofa – Kravet
www.kravet.com
516.293.2000

Table base –
Matt Deschler, Formed Objects
503.422.5565

Glass table top – Bendheim
www.bendheim.com
800.606.7621

Occasional table – Wendell Cattle
www.wendellcastlecollection.com
866.999.4266

Breakfast table – McGuire
www.kohlerinteriors.com
800.662.4847

Side chairs – Directions
www.directions86.com

Painting – Christopher Reilly
Winston Wachter Fine Art
www.winstonwachter.com
206.652.5855

MASTER BEDROOM

Custom bedframe –
Hensel Design Studios
206.728.1657

Nightstands – Altura Furniture, Inc.
www.alturafurniture.com
503.288.2228

Lamps – Simon Pearce
www.simonpearce.com
802.295.2711

Chaise – Kravet Furniture
www.kravet.com
516.293.2000

Side table – Powell & Bonnell
www.powellandbonnell.com
416.964.6210

Custom bench –
Hensel Design Studios
206.728.1657

DESIGNER

Steven Hensel
Hensel Design Studios
Seattle, WA
206.728.1657



Dining Room