

# Custom Tailored

A Seattle designer whips up warm and inviting rooms using an earthy color palette and one-of-a-kind pieces handcrafted by skilled artisans.

writer by Nancy Milligan photographer Laurie Black

Designer Steven Hensel pairs an ultra-contemporary bronze game table with a custom demilune table featuring Art Deco details in this Seattle living room. The silver-leaf fluted cabinet is topped by burl wood inlaid with a sterling-silver sunburst pattern. The layered wax artwork above is by contemporary artist Betsy Eby.



**This photo:** A distinctive metal-and-glass coffee table draws the eye in the living room. The lines of the reproduction French Art Deco piece echo the original diamond-pattern leaded-glass windows of the gracious 1909 home. **Opposite:** Hensel painted the dark oak beams in the entry's coffered ceilings to create a light and airy feel.



## Striking contemporary design

is designer Steven Hensel's calling card, so the chance to decorate a 1909 Italianate house in Seattle for clients with decidedly traditional tastes posed a compelling challenge. Hensel's clients were moving to the area for business but maintaining their original residence on the East Coast, so they wanted to furnish the home from scratch. They charged Hensel with creating a home suitable for both everyday family life with their two sons and entertaining large groups for business and pleasure.

Taking into consideration the ornate yet clean lines of the house's symmetrical architecture, Hensel introduced his own furniture designs sculpted by local craftspeople to play off the leaded-glass windows and intricate moldings and millwork. The result: interiors that boast artistic and custom-tailored details at every turn. "Every piece is specifically designed for where it sits," he says.

Hensel's major design cues came from the homeowners, who are drawn to 19th-century Biedermeier and 20th-century Art Deco styles of furniture. "I took an intentional look at how to meld the two styles, which share elegant curves, yet spare lines, and a distinct sense of luxury," he says. "I infused them with contemporary overtones to make the formality more accessible and to give the decor an eclectic feel."

In some cases, he reinterpreted classic forms, such as the Art Deco harp shape that defines the base of the new dining room table. Other pieces, like the conical bronze game table in the living room, are blatantly contemporary. "There's no mistaking you're in a home that would only be possible today," he says.

Warm colors and sumptuous textures provide a soothing backdrop for handcrafted pieces and issue an inviting welcome that counteracts Seattle's gray skies. "I lean toward colors found in nature," the designer says of his subtle palette, which combines creams and golden browns with a soft silvery blue for contrast and interest.

Throughout the house, Hensel pulled the honeyed tones of the original oak floors up the walls with latte-color draperies. To add plush texture and dimension without distracting from the soothing palette, he employed neutral upholstery in mohair, chenille, linen, leather, and silk. "This allows the distinctive forms of the furniture to speak," Hensel says. Darker wood and metal tones punctuate the rooms and provide definition.

In the living room, Hensel downplayed the formality of a mohair sofa and metal-and-glass coffee table by pairing the elegant pieces with a humble sisal rug. A chenille-tufted headboard speaks of pure luxury in the master bedroom, but steel-framed accent pieces and a fanciful metal Art Deco screen keep the look from going too soft. "If you take an interior too seriously, it ends up giving a standoffish message," he says. "Although somewhat formal, this house is very livable."



"The dining table takes a fresh, contemporary look at a prominent Art Deco style," Hensel says of his custom design, which is fabricated in steel with an inlaid bronze top. The graceful lines of the chairs repeat the curved harp shape. The sideboard shows off the beautifully rippled grain of sapele wood.





“Tremendous effort went into scaling furnishings



to fit precisely in the rooms so they'd feel comfortable.”

**Opposite:** The fireplace defines the sitting area of the master bedroom. A curvaceous chaise is upholstered in linen velvet and topped with silk pillows for added luxury. **Left:** Hensel carved out a dressing area in the master bedroom by screening off the in-room closets. He custom designed the translucent resin screen, playing with motifs from the fireplace and coming up with a contemporary version Art Deco-style tulip design in steel and bronze. An upholstered chair repeats the curves and offers a spot for reading. **Below:** A channel-tufted chenille bed frame offers plush comfort in the master bedroom.



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—DESIGNER STEVEN HENSEL