



SHOWCASING DESIGN: THE SAN FRANCISCO DECORATOR SHOWCASE

Randy Arczynski, co-founder of Randolph & Hein, recently reminisced about the launching of the San Francisco Decorators Showcase in 1977: "California designers—and Northern Californians in particular—were the most influential and closely watched designers in the entire international design community. Our city had Michael Taylor, John Dickinson, Tony Hail, Billy Gaylord, and Val Arnold—far more than the population or economic base of our city should have had based on the demographics."

Thirty-two years later, Showcase still celebrates San Francisco's architecturally significant homes while highlighting both new and established designers. It was interior designer Nan Rosenblatt's vision of creating a fundraising vehicle for the four-year-old University High School's financial aid program and the opportunity to take advantage of local interior design talent in the Bay Area that resulted in the Showcase. The Showcase's Design Advisory Committee has included the legendary Dickinson, Hail, and Charles Pfister on its past boards. Taylor and Gaylord made contributions to early Showcases.

This year's Showcase, a formal 1910 Georgian-style mansion designed and built by architect Nathaniel Blaisdell, opens to the public April 25th. The Design Advisory Committee, headed by Arczynski, chooses participants for each house. Traditionally, the "public" rooms have gone to seasoned professionals, while the smaller, more intimate rooms were for freshman designers. Once selected, designers rely on the help of contractors, artisans, showrooms, antiques galleries, and installers, as well as the guidance of the committee to achieve their beautiful rooms and landscapes in the short span of a few months. The result is a legacy of design benefits both the design community and the visiting public.

Of the many notable rooms that have been created over the years, there are a few that particularly stand out. In the 1988 showhouse, a Beaux Arts home on Washington Street, Paul Vincent Wiseman of The

Then & Now

Wiseman Group designed a neoclassical-style living room. The yellow Adam-style chintz from Clarence House set the tone of the room through upholstery and window treatments. Wiseman combined period antiques and modern art in an exciting way that harmonized with the architecture of the house.

Another room with an unusual visual pairing was the 1987 dining room. In the Broadway mansion built by Stetson George Hindes, James Marzo papered the walls with garnet sandpaper and covered the floor with a straw carpet. He juxtaposed the rustic shell with luxurious fabrics, furnishings, and antiques. The room centered on a Neoclassical rock crystal and gilt iron chandelier known as "Herman." This dazzling environment was complemented by a panoramic view of the San Francisco Bay, the Marin Headlands, and the Palace of Fine Arts.

Also reflecting the natural beauty of the bay was the 1997 master bedroom created by Tucker & Marks. Situated in a Mediterranean-style Sea Cliff home that had belonged to prominent florist Narisco Baldocchi, the bedroom was a part of a dramatic master suite and featured an opulent custom-upholstered sleigh bed with draped corona in terra-cotta jacquard fabric from Pierre Frey. The color scheme was continued in the companion pair of Han Polychrome Pottery Jar Lamps flanking the bed and echoed by the "international orange" of the Golden Gate Bridge in the distance.

Some rooms are memorable not for their grandness but for their inventive use of limited space. Ann Jones's 1990 dog's room on the third floor of a stately Georgian Revival-style home on Vallejo was small in square footage but big on whimsy. A tramp art-style cupboard embellished with dog treats displayed pet accessories. The famous canines of Dianne Feinstein, Steve Silver, Charlotte Swig Shultz, and Gail Schlesinger Glasser were exhibited in frames edged with dog





PHOTOS: 1 & 2 Paul Vincent Wiseman, 1988 Living Room, Photo: Alan Weintraub
3 & 4 James Marzo, 1987 Dining Room, Photo: John Vaughan
5 & 6 Tucker & Marks, 1997 Master Bedroom, Photo: Mark Darley
7 Kathleen Navarra, 1999 Linen Closet, Photo: Margot Hartford
8 Anne Jones, 1990 Dog Room, Photo: John Vaughan
9 & 10 Orlando Diaz-Azcuy, 1998 Dining Room and 1994 Grand Salon

biscuits. Kathleen Navarra turned the linen room on the second floor of the 1999 showhouse, a Tudor-style mansion on Divisadero Street, into a functional boutique. Navarro's organized, colorful "clean room" is a response to the needs of a modern family with children and pets.

The seamless ease of these rooms belies the difficulties experienced during the history of Showcase, the most significant being the AIDS crisis of the 1980s. Looking through three decades of Showcase catalogs brings to mind the many gifted people who were lost. It is also a testament to how the design community survived and reinvented itself.

The 2009 Showcase presents designers with the challenges of economic and environmental scarcities, but it also provides the opportunity for creative ingenuity. This year's Showcase will draw on the past while looking to the future. Designer Agnes Bourne, who owned the Willis Polk mansion that was the 1994 showhouse, will co-chair the advisory committee with Arczynski. Bourne's home on Jackson Street was called The Stonehouse Project; the directive of that Showcase was "A Prototype of Healthful Living and Design for the Next Century." At that time Bourne wrote, "the design process is the lifeboat for living appropriately on the planet.... Designers help people realize full self expression and give service to physical life and possibly spiritual life on Earth."

Fifteen years later, many of this year's designers will address the same issues. According to Bourne, the theme for this year's showcase is "Timeless Design," both locally and globally. "There will not be an emphasis on the lack of anything," she says, rather the focus will be on what is aesthetic and authentic.

Reflecting this restrained luxury will be Orlando Diaz-Azcuy's living room. Diaz-Azcuy's work is represented in past showhouses: he did a periwinkle and imperial yellow grand salon in The Stonehouse Project, where he respected both the historical integrity of the room and the environment. He also did the dining room of the 1998 showcase in conjunction with David Oldroyd and Greg Stewart. A massive circular travertine stone table, which Michael Taylor had installed earlier, dominated the room. Diaz-Azcuy used furniture and lighting from ODA Designs that were simple yet visually rich to complete the design.

While Diaz-Azcuy is a veteran of Showcase and the design industry, the 2009 Showcase has attracted many new designers. According to Showcase Design Coordinator Delanie Borden, more than half of the applicants this year were designers who had not submitted room designs in the past. Bourne described this house as representing the next generation of designers and "emergent talent." Among the sixty-five designers who presented boards for thirty spaces, there was a common thread of conservation and cultural awareness.

Bourne hinted that many of the designers had drawn inspiration from international sources, such as French interior and furniture designer Christian Liaigre and Belgian antiques dealer, collector, and designer Axel Vervoordt. Matthew Leverone's family and breakfast rooms will reflect an affinity with Liaigre's tailored and understated sensibility. In contrast, Nicole Hollis will be doing a "Vervoordtesque" cabinet of curiosities containing wonders of nature, science, and art for the entrance hallway.

Arczynski's final musings on this year's Showcase: "What is interior design? It is a melding of various arts, skills, sensibilities and most of all it is a creative process." Although he says "interior design in today's world is more often driven by practicality than by a quest for beauty," he still believes that—as in 1977—it is the goal of this year's designers to "seduce and set a standard to inspire the people who are our audience." He concludes, "Let's dazzle them as much as we can."

Kendra Boutell is Director of Sales and Marketing for Urban Chateau Antiquités & Décoration. She began her career in the interior design industry twenty-five years ago in the Shears & Window showroom. In addition, she has worked for Kneidler/Fauchère and the antiques galleries Therien & Co. and Ed Hardy San Francisco.



THE 2009 SAN FRANCISCO DECORATOR SHOWCASE

APRIL 25 THROUGH MAY 25

Benefitting
San Francisco University High School's
Financial Aid Program

2830 Pacific Avenue
(between Divisadero and Broderick Streets)

Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
Thursday 10 a.m.-7 p.m.
Sunday & Memorial Day 11 a.m.-4 p.m.
Closed Monday (except Memorial Day, May 25)

Tickets: Available at the Door
\$30 general admission; \$25 for seniors
Group rates available arranged in
advance by calling 415-447-3115

THURSDAY EVENING BOOK SIGNING SERIES 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.

April 30
Orlando Diaz-Azcuy & Diane Dorrons Saecks
Orlando Diaz-Azcuy

May 7
John Wheatman
A Good House is Never Done
and *Meditations on Design*

May 14
Zahid Sardar & Marion Brenner
New Garden Design

May 21
Squeak Carnwath
Squeak Carnwath: Painting Is No Ordinary Object

Information
415-447-3115
www.decoratorshowcase.org