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IN THE GARDEN WITH SUSAN BATES

Architect Robert W. Cowman and interior designer Patricia Hills worked in concert to create character and warmth within the confines of this voluminous penthouse high atop the Crane Building. Cowman juxtaposes vertical-grained African wood with an etched metal fireplace that rises dramatically to ceiling height. Hills plots her area rug design along the direction of the dark stained wood floor, and the striped texture in the sofa fabric as a way of reinforcing the north/south direction of the space against the compelling view to the east. The custom coffee table has a wood base by Interior Components and individual pieces of parchment paper applied to the subsurface in an Mondrian-like pattern and sealed to a hard finish by artist Ron Wagner. Atop the coffee table, a large platter made of crushed eggshells from Please Be Seated adds an organic touch.

RESHAPING HISTORY

WRITTEN BY DONNA PIZZI PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREG KOZAWA

WHEN ARCHITECT ROBERT W. COWMAN brought interior designer Patricia Hills of Hills Design Group onto this 3,000-square-foot penthouse project atop the Crane Building, he brought something else to the table as well – something, as the TV commercial says, that's "priceless" – mutual respect. Cowman and Hills garnered that respect after decades of working together on various residential and commercial projects throughout the Northwest.

All that history was essential to their tackling the architectural and design challenges presented by the penthouse, an impressive space with 125 linear feet of terrace with expansive views all the way to Mount Hood, with such aplomb. Cowman presented his initial ideas about personalizing the space to the prospective buyers during the framing stages while they were still negotiating a purchase. Since the developer had to continue with the build-out in case negotiations fell through, carrying out those ideas became more complex after the partial build-out was complete.

Faced with an in-place shell, plumbing locations that could not be changed, exposed mechanical system access panels in the powder room, and soffits that left no room for drapery mechanisms along the terrace window wall, Cowman and Hills had to work their design magic to create a visually stunning space that "bowed," as Hills says, "to the presence of the people in the space, the views, and artwork," while also being functional, warm and comfortable. In turn, the owners viewed the transition from a sizeable single family detached home with an extensive garden and intimate garden views to a modern condominium in a more urban setting as an adventure.

Happily, the team, which included JDL Development, whose workmanship Cowman and Hills describe as "flawless," worked seamlessly with the owners, who were knowledgeable, sophisticated, yet very down-to-earth. "It is wonderful when people come to you with an appreciation for design," says Hills, a member of International Interior Design Association (IIDA). "In this case, the client was also willing to put their trust in our suggestions and be open to new ideas."

As a stepping off point for his architectural design, Cowman often illustrates his vision using magazine photos. On this project, he chose a photo of a New York City apartment with wood paneling. "It was very white," says Cowman, "but the feeling was also very warm, very classic - nothing that had 'fad' written on it."

Cowman also plots out furniture arrangements to help achieve the correct room size and proportion."I have to make sure it's going to work," he says. "Furnishings are a real generator of the architecture, some-

The African Khaya mahogany used throughout the penthouse was cut from just two trees, and all slip matched to give a more continuous feeling to the wood grain. Pendant lights highlight the effect. The dining table, designed by Hills and constructed by Interior Components features a starburst pattern at its center, which extends out into the leaves when added. McGuire leather and fabric chairs complete the dining experience. The play on architectural shapes provides division to the space without interrupting the big room layout. The table is set with "Tree" dinnerware by Porcel from Please Be Seated.

thing I learned from my late wife, Beth, who was an interior designer at GBD Architects." Beth introduced Hills to Cowman after she hired her at GBD in 1978. The team chose African Khaya mahogany as the wood element found in every room, whether in the form of paneling or built-ins, all finely crafted by Interior Components. "The rooms are wrapped in wood," explains Cowman, "and the view is the balance to that."

"Everything in our design pays homage to the view," agrees Hills. "It was like having a mural along one entire side of your living space - everything was driven by it. Too much pattern in the interior would have been distracting."

Similarly, Cowman wanted etched metal as a counterpoint to the wood, juxtaposing it in both the fireplace surround and the vent hood in the kitchen. Hills worked closely with TROVO Design on the color and complexity of the pattern to keep it in context with the other materials. Cowman's ingenious wall-hung buffet in the dining room rises one foot off the floor to create a floating effect, while a dual-purpose media enclosure mimics it in the living room. Here, he conjoins the cantilever wood element with a second piece of furniture that reaches the floor and is stained to match the dark Brazilian cherry flooring, where it seems to disappear. "I didn't want the TV enclosure to present a major mass in the living room," explains Cowman, "so I joined the two pieces together." The TV rises out of the top of the second piece when in use and is stored out of sight when done. The cantilevered piece encloses the speakers and storage.

To create further drama in the space, Cowman increased the width of the soffits along the terrace, which also made room for the mechanics of remote-controlled drapery, which Hills fabricated in ivory wool challis for its ability to hang in soft, natural folds.

Hills reiterates Cowman's play on geometric shapes that divide the living areas without hindering the open space by "shaping" the theme of the custom living room rug as counterpoint to the dining room rug from the owner's previous home. "I worked with Madison Millinger," she says, "to use a ribbon shape, which ties in with the organic vines in the dining room rug, to create a pattern that is more contemporary in design."

A pair of reupholstered French chairs from the former house finds new life alongside the well-camouflaged entertainment center in the living area. The kitchen's etched metal vent hood, seen rising above the wood wall in the dining room, echoes the texture found in the fireplace. Not seen at right, is a pair of structural columns clad in the same metal, which flanks a cozy reading area with full height built-in bookcases also done in mahogany. At left, the built-in bedside tables fit snugly next to the custom bed frame built to support an existing mattress that raises the owners high enough to see over the terrace rail. Home Treasures bedding from French Quarter Linens dresses the bed. The 'Anastasia' coverlet in loden gray and atmospheric-hued 'Miller' sheets and 'Valentine' shams add a feel of calm.

Unable to change the height of the existing windowsill, Cowman raised the marble clad tub 8" higher than average so bathers can enjoy the view. A remote - controlled Roman shade provides privacy. Owing to thorough detailing, each of the recessed lights is centered in the marble tiles overhead, while the pendant lights over the vanity align exactly with the wood/mirror intersection. Campbell's Tile Concepts aligned the marble tile joints from wall to floor and wrapped the tile behind the tub upward to the ceiling. An electrical outlet concealed in a drawer under the sink keeps power items out of sight.

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ARCHITECT: Robert W Cowman, AIA 503.352.4737

INTERIOR DESIGNER: Hills Design Group, Pat Hills 503.223.0605

BUILDING DEVELOPER: Guardian Real Estate Services, Tom Brenneke 503.802.3600

SOURCES Kitchen Countertop Supplier: Intrepid Marble & Granite; Tile Installation: Campbell's Tile Concepts; Shower Enclosures & Sliding Glass Door: Heritage Glass; Lighting Fixtures: LUX Lighting; Cabinetry & Architectural Paneling, DR Table & LR End Tables: Interior Components; Kitchen & Bath Plumbing Fixtures: Ferguson: Sinks: Blanco Silgranit, Faucet: KWC Suprimo; Sinks & Tub: Kohler, Toilet: Toto; Fittings: Hansgrohe; Appliances: Range: Gaggenau, Dishwasher: ASKO, Wall Ovens: DACOR, Refrigerator: Thermador; A/V/ Music/Lighting Control: Room Service Home Theater Specialists; Fireplace: Lisac's Fireplaces; LR Rug: Madison Millinger; Coffee Table: Interior Components/Ron Wagner; Bedding: French Quarter Linens; Cabinet Pulls: Chown Hardware; Dinnerware & Accessories: Please Be Seated

The owners rearranged the spec build-out of the kitchen so that the black glass Gaggenau induction cooktop is now center stage on the island. Pendant lights over the island and sconces near the sink, coupled with under cabinet lighting, create a glowing infill light to counteract any dark shadows caused by overhead recessed lighting. Drawers proliferate through the kitchen, providing fully accessible storage. The island becomes another casual eating area with three leather stools provided for comfort.

The powder room is a windowless interior space that nevertheless has plenty of eye-catching attributes. A recessed mirror creates a sense of thickness and depth to the satin-finished MDF walls done in a jewel tone. Wall-hung cabinets feature under-lighting that highlights the special imported square travertine tile flooring that has a stained etched pattern. Hinged wood panels on the ceiling artfully conceal 2' x 2' mechanical system access panels and an exhaust fan. An iridescent blue bubble votive holder accents the vanity.

SHOPTALK: Cowman + Hills

Q: WHAT IS THE LAST PLACE THAT MADE YOU THINK, I WISH I'D DONE THAT?

ROBERT: The lobby and reception area of "The Hotel" in Las Vegas. The space is totally interior with dramatic high ceilings, oversized dark, ebony brown painted columns with freeform geometric backlit elements running their full height. The space is also very contemporary. The lighting is dramatic without an over-handed, bright-to-dark effect. The colors and textures of the architecture are very rich while remaining extraordinarily soothing. For being such a large space it feels very human in scale. It's a feel-good space.

Q: DESCRIBE YOUR GREATEST "FIND" OF THE YEAR.

ROBERT: One very important thing that is required on most of my projects is a smoke alarm. They have been around for many years and have never been attractive. A company by the name of Kidde now makes a low profile smoke alarm which is 5.25 inches square and only protrudes 1/2 inch down from the ceiling. Since you need one in every bedroom and another in the adjoining hall it is nice to be able to specify a unit that looks good.

PAT: The creative home office ideas from Steelcase that were shown at Neocon this year.

Q: WHO WERE YOUR EARLY INSPIRATIONS AND DESIGN ICONS?

PAT: My design icons include, John Saladino, Barbara Barry, Mies van der Rohe, and Isamu Noguchi. Early influences came from Beth Cowman and Steve Domreis - my mentors at (now) GBD. They taught me about attention to detail, spatial relationships, and that design can truly have an effect on our quality of life.

Q: WHAT IS THE FIRST THING YOU DO WHEN YOU ENTER A SPACE YOU WILL BE DESIGNING?

ROBERT: I note what works and what doesn't. Then I try to determine what will make it better for my clients. When I first walked into the penthouse, the volume of the space was very impressive, but it lacked complexity and interest. I fixed that by modulating the volume with soffits, adding wood for warmth, and lighting to give the space drama and definition.

Q: DO YOU HAVE A PARTICULAR STYLE?

PAT: I think it works best when the designer and the client are on a similar "wavelength". I have a lot of respect for the client's initial thoughts and try to listen to the reasons behind their ideas. I gravitate toward an interior design style that integrates with the architecture to get away from the look of "applied" finishes and "dropped in" furnishings. The people who will use the space and the context of the space are primary and so I tend toward natural materials, variety in textures, and nuanced colors to keep the people and their activities the focal point. >>

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In the kitchen, absolute black granite produces a dramatic, glowing surface on the center island that nearly camouflages the black glass Gaggenau induction electric cooktop trimmed in stainless steel. The cooktop uses electromagnetic fields to heat pans directly, leaving the surface relatively cool. But practicality doesn't trump beauty here, where the etched metal vent hood draws the eye upward to white pendant lights and the cozy corner seating beyond.

"Everything in our design pays homage to the view. "It was like having a mural along one entire side of your living space - everything was driven by it. Too much pattern in the interior would have been distracting."

Sleek, contemporary styling nestles the master bedroom behind a Heritage Glass pocket door finished with an obscuring film that aligns with the horizontal reveals in the adjacent wood wall panels. Cowman slopes the back wall of the built-in bed to create a back rest, so that reading in bed can be punctuated by views of the city at night from the windows opposite.

Crema marfil marble slabs handsomely finished by Conrad Stone Cutter lines the master bath, which features a double sink and tub with beveled edges. The steam shower's custom marble bench is finished with a teak seat for warmth.

Finally, the walls of the powder room are done in revealed MDF panels sprayed with a dark satin-painted finish that reiterates a color found in the living room rug. Victorian style cherub sconces add fill light to the charming space, while a wood panel ceiling neatly camouflages two mechanical system access panels and an exhaust fan.

The final touch is a lighting system that instantly fills the space with light cascading over classic wood tones, textures, metal and stone that says, "Welcome home!"

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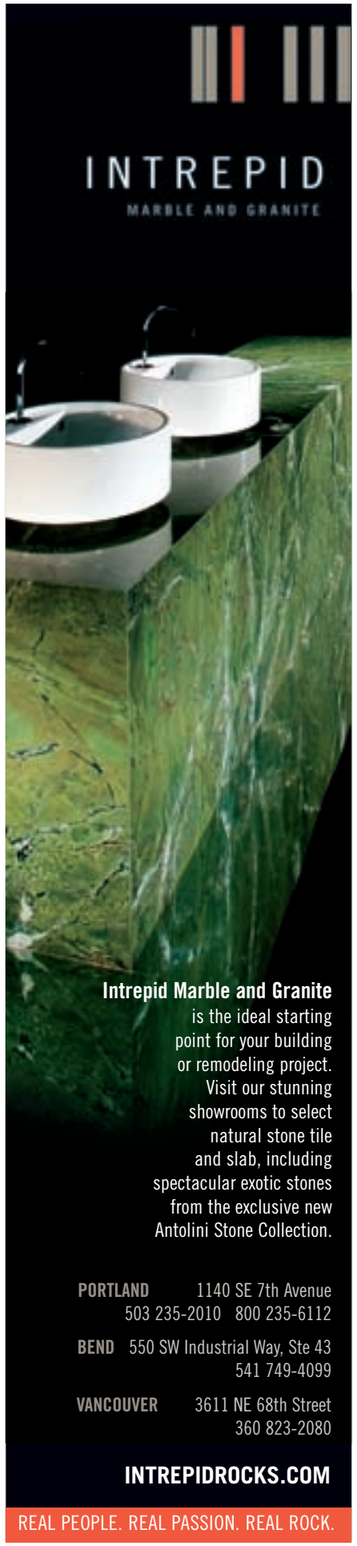

RESHAPING HISTORY

The Crane Building

The 1909 Crane Building is an historic building located in the Pearl District. The building was rehabilitated for mixed use in 2006 by Guardian Real Estate Services, a real estate investment and management company. It was awarded the best Oregon interior design award for 2007 by the American Institute of Architects. Guardian occupies the 2nd and 3rd floors of the building as their corporate offices. The penthouse designed by Robert Cowman and Pat Hills is one of two elegant spaces located on the top floor of the building. The bottom floor is devoted to retail, including Bay 13 Restaurant on the SE corner of the block. The next three floors are rental apartments.

GUARDIAN PRESIDENT TOM BRENNEKE SPEAKS ABOUT THE REDEVELOPMENT:

Q: What were your first thoughts when you stepped into the Crane Building?

BRENNEKE: I had just come off the restoration of my own house, and was eager to do it again. I saw the Crane Building as a diamond in the rough with great bones. It was so raw at first glance that my first words were, "What the heck am I doing with this?" Honestly, I felt a combination of foreboding at times, due to the size, and because the potential hidden problems with an historic property, and yet certain it was going to be special, because I had Bing Sheldon from SERA Architects as our lead architect as my inspiration. I also saw it as a great opportunity for our firm to do something to revitalize the Pearl District.

BING SHELDON, OF SERA ARCHITECTS TOUCHES ON THE CHALLENGES:

Q: What are the unique challenges of rehabilitating an old building?

SHELDON: Seismic upgrading, getting that to fit within a budget that would really justify the whole deal. Our seismic upgrading alone was $2 million, which doesn't add any value. In any old building you can set a budget, but there will be surprises, and they won't be pleasant. There is a higher risk than with new construction.

Q: What inspired your vision for the Crane Building?

BRENNEKE: The history is an important part. If walls could talk! What happened in 1910, 1920, when this was the Crane Plumbing Company's corporate offices? Crane was a national plumbing supply company, with similar properties strategically placed across the country, always with warehouses on the rail. The ground floor was the showroom, second floor office, balance was warehouse. Its character was another part: the well-preserved brick, the original entry stairs, the historic oak wood doors, original windows, and old Crane safe that we incorporated into our offices. Finally, the various emblems, including the unique emblem that architect William Knighton, who did the Governor Hotel, left as his "signature" in the building.

SHELDON: I liked the fact that Brenneke's corporate offices would sit just where the Crane offices had, a company that was one of the leading lights in the industrialization of America. To me, it's always a good fit when you're doing historic rehab if the new user approximates the original profile of the building; it's a more symbiotic relationship.

SHOPTALK : COWMAN+ HILLS

Q: FAVORITE GETAWAY?

ROBERT: My partner and I enjoy traveling so the last place we visited is often our favorite getaway. Our last trip was to Greece where we especially enjoyed our time on the island of Crete. A week in Paris on the way home was certainly a highlight of the trip. So much to see and so many wonderful neighborhood restaurants. Our next trip will be to Spain which sounds incredibly diverse.

PAT: A little cabin on the Oregon Coast - right on the beach. Listening to the sounds of the ocean, watching the ever-changing colors of the water and sand, watching the sun set over the horizon. Sitting quietly by the ocean reminds us of the constancy and power of nature – putting everything else in perspective.

Q: WHAT'S A FAVORITE DECORATING/ DESIGN TIP YOU SHARE WITH CLIENTS?

ROBERT: My practice involves many remodels of existing homes which were built between the 20's and the present. So I work with many different styles of homes. The one thing that I find missing in many of these homes, even the more recent ones, is a connection from the individual rooms to the private garden area. This connection can be made with larger windows and French doors which open onto an on-grade terrace. The impact of these two simple devices on the individual rooms and the home in general is always incredibly expanding. The gardens become an extension and integral part of the modified rooms making the rooms feel so much more inviting. Even if the terrace is seldom used just the ability to go outside from the room changes its character for the better.

Q: BEST INVESTMENT FOR YOUR HOME?

PAT: The best investment? Before you begin a project, spend enough time to know what your true likes and dislikes are. Think about how you will use the space. Collect images to share and discuss with your designer. These images may seem disconnected to you, but a designer can spot a common thread. This process will help ensure that your purchases will be items you will love for a very long time.

ROBERT: The best investment you can make in your home is to enlist the services of a design professional to integrate changes or upgrades you want to make to your living environment. Any major modifications you make to your home are going to be expensive so it is very important to get it right the first time. It is the design professionals job to suggest design solutions which are appropriate for your home, satisfy your functional requirements and increase your home value.