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PAST PERFECTED

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LIVING ROOM Owner-designer Benjamin Silver expanded the footprint of this 1930s Herman Brookman home to 2700 sq. ft., restored the steel casement windows and added French doors, which flood the house with light from every direction. Nestled in the original bay window overlooking the vast manicured gardens is an 18th c. Buddha atop a chest from Cargo. Manolo Moridejar's painting left counters Benjamin's artwork, and furniture designs: a low, sleek sofa and cross-grain cut tree trunk coffee table mounted on steel opposite the Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams "James" chair.



LIKE A MIRAGE THAT SUDDENLY appears in the midst of intense desert heat, this 1930s Herman Brookman estate materializes at the end of a tree-lined driveway, where the Georgian style stucco house rises up before an acre of gardens originally designed by one of Portland's first professionally registered landscape architects, Wallace Huntington.

From the moment Benjamin Silver of Benjamin Silver Design set foot in this Brookman home, he was smitten. Having previously owned other Brookman homes, he was familiar with the quality of his design aesthetic, including such details as curved staircases, tray ceilings and custom millwork.

Born in New York City in 1891, Brookman began his career with New York architect Harrie T. Lindeberg before moving to Portland in 1923 at the behest of M. Lloyd Frank of Meier & Frank department store, who had him design his estate "Fir Acres" (now part of Lewis & Clark). Other well-known Brookman Portland structures include the Byzantine-style architecture found in Temple Beth Israel and the 1926 Bitar Mansion in Laurelhurst.

"Brookman was someone who loved 18th-19th century architecture, and reinterpreted it for the 1920s and 30s," says Benjamin. "I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to reinterpret Brookman's designs into our modern lifestyle."

One of the first things Benjamin did to this Brookman home was to introduce the dining room into the 50' long living room. "What impressed me the first time I walked through the charming entry down to the expansive sunken living room," recalls Benjamin, "was its beamed ceiling, bay window and informal fireplace. Instinctively, I felt one side of the large living room should be for entertaining and dining. So, by removing the large venting chimney that ran through the old dining room and some walls, I was able to incorporate the old dining room - a very strange little room that barely had any room to negotiate around a tiny table there - into part of the new kitchen."

It's not surprising that Benjamin, who has bought and restored approximately 25 old houses in Portland in as many years, not including those he's done for his clients, has gone from being a very precocious 12-year-old antiques dealer in London to a home designer who creates clean, modern spaces amidst



vintage dwellings. Restoring houses was something he swore he'd never do, yet here he is today excelling at the same job his parents did in London during the late 60s and 70s. "My father was a very successful contractor," says Benjamin. "He and my mother worked as a very talented team, redesigning old houses in London, and turning them into cool, modern dream homes."

They never understood Benjamin's passion for antiques, especially at such a young age, but that, too, has changed. "I've gone from a more traditional style home filled with antiques to fewer antiques. I believe a home should be a backdrop for my art and furnishings, creating a simple, clean aesthetic."

Although he doesn't like to title his abstract paintings, lest it reduce the buyer's imagination about the work, he believes in naming the homes he restores. It wasn't long before this house was christened "Blandings" after the 1948 Cary Grant movie, "Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House."

"Like the house in the 'Blandings' movie, this house looked lovely on the surface, but the minute we started opening it up, it was so bad, that I had to rebuild it entirely," says Benjamin. "There isn't a surface that wasn't touched, redone, replaced or restored."

The addition of a family room with a Brookman style tray ceiling, butler's pantry, and laundry off the new kitchen provide more usable living and work space to the former cottage.

"I really wanted a place you could hang out in, with French doors that open all the way - six feet of open door space that ties the inside to the outside. Now you are able to look through the house from the den at one end, through to the family room at the other."

Tearing down the central chimney that ran through the former living room and up into the master, which made it nearly too small to be inhabitable, was integral to the redesign of the house. It also gave them four additional feet in width for what would become the kitchen. "The original galley kitchen was only about 8' x 12', and was located by the kitchen door, where the main sink now resides."

To maintain the kitchen's formal traditional style, appliances are hidden from view with a fully integrated 36" Subzero and convection oven tucked within the pantry.

FAMILY ROOM The family room addition incorporated Brookman's characteristic cast cement fireplace mantel, and tray ceiling. **STAIRCASE** Brookman's signature curved staircase connects main floor with newly expanded master bedroom. **DINING ROOM** In the dead of winter, an 8 hole was cut in the new dining area for steel French doors, framed outdoors by an existing wisteria, to open onto the park-like garden. Urban Timberworks fabricated Benjamin's elmwood dining table design, which he christened "The Jean Dining Table" after his late mother. Toledo dining chairs by Knoll, Kush rug, George II chandelier from Chown. At 18, Benjamin purchased the 8 day grandfather clock in London, which has been crated back and forth across both continents several times.



Practicality is just one step behind beauty, with self-closing drawers in traditional, inset cabinetry by Crestwood, Inc., with small bone detail. A Visual Comforts egg light fixture over the farmhouse sink brings shine, while a prep sink and bar area near the 36" Viking stove with gas top and electric oven make entertaining easy in the adjacent family room.

"Part of making a project like this come together smoothly," says Benjamin, "is having really good, long standing relationships with the craftsmen that are able to bring my vision into reality. I also like working with local companies like Chown, who supplied all the hardware," says Benjamin. "They were fantastic."

The butler's pantry built-in, which features a Carrera marble counter, tall mullioned inset doors with pin hinges and nickel ribbon pulls, was designed to provide more storage space and serving area for the kitchen.

MASTER BATH Former upstairs laundry turned master bath features hexagonal marble flooring and Carrera subway tile that acts as a dramatic backdrop for a nickel medicine cabinet and Edison sconces. A single inset sink rests within a 60" Carrera marble countertop. A luxurious footed slipper tub invites the weary to soak to their heart's content, while contemplating the Benjamin Silver abstract oil painting. **MASTER BEDROOM** Benjamin's gray mohair bed continues the gray and cream motif in the newly expanded master bedroom.





“It’s a great formal extension of the kitchen,” he says of the area once allotted to a breakfast nook.

With the large chimney removed, the upstairs master bedroom became spacious enough to welcome the gun metal gray mohair bed that Benjamin designed for the room and then paired with dual Williams-Sonoma lamps and bedside tables.

The unseen, however, is often as important as the seen for Benjamin. “So often people don’t realize until they begin living in a home what they might have overlooked. Therefore,” he explains, “if I am working for clients who still enjoy a traditional look, I make certain that everything inside is brought up to date with all the conveniences they may need. It may look like a traditional home, but it is totally 21st century with energy efficient lighting, air conditioning, wireless sound system, heating and cooling all controlled by an app on your phone.”

What is more leisurely than being able to get in bed and turn out the lights, without having to get out again!

By opening up the house in all directions with more windows, French doors, large kitchen and family room addition, the new landscaping and the older Wallace Huntington gardens have become not only more visible, but also physically more accessible. “The house now has incredible light,” says Benjamin, who enjoys relaxing in a pair of Bittersweet Chocolate Mohair Williams-Sonoma chairs in the den at the living room end of house. The room features a charming fireplace and built-in bookcases that house his collection of 18th century boxes and other mementoes from Benjamin’s past - some of which date back to his childhood days, buying and selling antiques in London under the tutelage of Mrs. Thrift, an antiques dealer from Portobello Road, others from his years in Los Angeles, selling beautiful things to beautiful people.

“But that didn’t give me fulfillment,” he says. “It wasn’t until I moved to Portland in 1990, and I drove around looking at house after beautiful house, which is what my parents did when I was a kid, that I began to feel fulfilled!”

His first restoration - a Victorian - was done on a handshake with a lovely Irish woman in Northwest Portland, who carried the loan. “It was very warm and traditional with antique furnishings,” he says. Although his taste has changed dramatically since then, his love of Portland’s old homes has not. All in all, he says, Portland has become a place to call home.



Dove White cabinets with Carrera marble countertops and backsplash are set against a Benjamin Moore Kendal Charcoal wall. A subway tile backsplash rises to enrobe restored steel casement windows. A family heirloom - 1970s blown glass Murano fruit bowl - lights up the counter near a Shaw farmhouse sink. Fully integrated dishwasher and recycling drawers are tucked behind recessed cabinetry below. A fixed steel window at the opposite end of the kitchen frames a pair of metal red lacquered chairs found at an estate sale.

The new additions required a redesign of the landscaping at the top of the rear garden. "Troy Clayton of Outdoor Spaces and I worked together to design those spaces," says Benjamin. A Dania smoked glass table top on stainless steel base with fabric chairs provides an outdoor dining area. A pond stocked with 80 fish is thriving at the bottom of the garden. A little garden shed built to match the house's architecture is located behind the 1930s close by Wallace Huntington featuring an extraordinary hedge.



NAME ONE THING YOU'VE DONE ON YOUR BUCKET LIST.

Silver: I've never had a bucket list, but I've been in love, had amazing friendships, traveled, gotten to sail the Riviera, and eat fresh cream gateaux at Louis Patisserie in London. I've also eaten the best Italian food in the world at Osteria Basilico, which all sounds very shallow, but I've never had a list, I've just been fortunate to do the things I wanted in life. Except it was always my dream to have a Georgian terraced house in Hampstead, and I haven't gotten that...yet!

WHAT ARE YOUR MOST COVETED ITEM(S)?

Silver: It used to be my Georgian tea caddies and gentleman's dressing boxes. All my antique boxes! Now that my parents have passed away, it's the silver candlesticks they were given on their wedding day and the little plastic silver shoe that sat atop their wedding cake. (Of course, there are lots of beautiful houses I covet, too!)

YOUR GREATEST INFLUENCE?

Silver: Mrs. Violet Agnes Thrift. She was a Scottish antique dealer and entrepreneur who made the simplest things in life exciting and beautiful. She was the most wonderful and influential person in my life from the time I was a child in London during the 1970s until today. She taught me to see beauty in everything. To be honest, sincere and make your life matter. When we met, I was 12 and she was in her 70s, and we became best friends. We were the "Harold and Maude" of the antique world. She'd pick me up at 6 am, it would be pouring with rain, dark and damp, and I'd get in the car and she'd say, "Isn't the car a wonderful thing, darling? It can keep you warm and dry and play music while it's driving you around!" She made everything ordinary seem magical and never stopped inspiring me to do all the things I love.

WHAT'S INSPIRING YOU NOW?

Silver: Mostly, very clean, modern design and reinterpreting that within vintage spaces. I look at lots of young European architects and designers for my influence, again, reinterpreting that into something slightly softer and more comfortable to suit our life here in Portland.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE CITY?

Silver: London!!!

GO-TO HOST GIFT?

Silver: Beautiful, fresh flowers from Sammy's.

MY WORK IS...

Silver: The first word that comes to mind is exhausting! I'm a perfectionist, and I don't rest until a project feels absolutely right. My mind is constantly on overdrive, trying to get every detail just as I see it in my mind.



PROJECT SOURCES

CONTRACTOR: ZB Construction

INTERIOR DESIGN/CABINETRY DESIGN

Benjamin Silver Design

houzz.com/pro/bgsdesign/benjamin-silver-design

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Outdoor Spaces

www.outdoorspacespdx.com

WINDOWS AND DOORS Portland Millwork

www.portlandmillwork.com

KITCHEN AND BATH FIXTURES

LIGHTING AND HARDWARE

Chown Hardware www.chown.com

KITCHEN APPLIANCES

Viking, Sub-Zero, Miele; Kitchen Faucets/Sink and Bath

Faucets: Rohl; Bath Sinks: Kalista; Rugs: Atelier Lapchi,

Kush Handmade Rugs; Countertop Materials: Intrepid

Marble & Granite