

Model Home

Fashion designer Geoffrey Henning paired cues from haute couture with street style when he decorated his own house.

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Some homes look like a furniture showroom, with perennially plumped pillows and sophisticated baubles placed just so. Some are a bit more eclectic—a jumble of inherited pieces and found objects arranged with more attention to function than form.

Perhaps the best homes, however, are those where every furnishing and fabric, all the art and antiques, each nook and cranny is an engaging reflection of the homeowner himself. Such is the case with the Dallas home of Geoffrey Henning. One of several “modern” homes built during the 1950s mini-boom in historic Kessler Park, the house sits on a full acre amid towering shade trees and features the streamlined design and large windows characteristic of mid-century design. When Henning first saw the home in 2003, however, it took real vision to imagine its possibilities.

“The former owner hadn’t done much updating,” recalls Henning. “The rooms were filled with Victorian love seats and busts of Benjamin Franklin, and there was carpet in the kitchen.” Still, there was something about the house—maybe its vast size (5,500 square feet) or the wonderful outdoor spaces (great for entertaining)—that finally won Henning over. He moved in... and immediately committed the first of not a few remodeling mistakes. “Instead of having much of the basic work done first,” he says, “I had to live in the basement for a month and a half while all that took place.”

As a design director for JC Penney, Henning knows all about fashion and art direction. So when it came to

interior design, instead of hiring a professional, he decided to rely on his instincts and simply go with what he liked. Just as an artist begins each painting with a clean canvas, Henning began his home design by having all the walls painted white and all the wood floors stained ebony with a high gloss. He then set about infusing the house with his distinctive sense of color and style.

“With white walls,” he says, “I was free to use color as a contrast.” In the bedrooms, he chose bold pops of color to distinguish each room. In one, bright red is set off against slate black. In another, burnt orange is the perfect counterpoint for chocolate brown. And in the guest room, a squeeze of lime makes everything look cool and delicious. As for decorative ideas in the bedrooms, Henning once again let his own personality shine through. “I’m very visual,” he says, “and maybe a little obsessive. I like geometric shapes and even numbers. I like things to be balanced. So when I see something that has all those properties, I’ll buy it in multiples.”

That preferred sense of balance is carried through beautifully in the main living area. Inspired by the Four Seasons Hotel where Henning stayed during a trip to Bali, the room is a study in Oriental tranquillity, with neutral colors and natural surfaces. When a big tree came down in his front yard, instead of discarding it whole, Henning cut two generous pieces from it, brought them into the living room, and made them into free-form stools, completing the room’s organically elegant mélange.

FACING PAGE A vintage Knoll desk is the centerpiece of the entry hall; Henning’s fashion drawings line the wall. He added the white granite tile and frosted glass squares in the front door to introduce soft light into the long, narrow space.

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That same serenity mixes with a dollop of modern style on the home’s spacious terrace. Stained concrete floors, comfy and classic furnishings, and an eye-catching chandelier make this spot a favorite place for relaxing with friends. Long panels of white linen are hung intermittently around the perimeter, adding a touch of cabana chic. Henning loves to have guests in his home, so the kitchen is designed to make entertaining easy. “I can’t stand clutter,” he says, “so I loved that this kitchen had so much storage space. I removed all the handles from the cabinets so there were clean, straight lines all the way around. And I have double ovens and double stoves, so preparing food for a big party is never a problem.”

When the party occurs, the guests who don’t end up out on the terrace find their way downstairs to an unexpected but utterly delightful array of rooms. For example, what was once a dark, somewhat airless space built into the side of a hill is now a swanky media room. “It was a natural,” says Henning. “There are no windows, it’s very quiet, and it stays cool in the summer.”

“Cool” it is, with large white couches affording ample view of the even-larger big-screen television. To avoid any feeling of claustrophobia, Henning encircled the room with majestic floor-to-ceiling mirrors. “To buy mirrors like that at retail would’ve been a fortune,” he says, “so I made them myself.” He had the mirrors cut at a wholesale place in Oak Cliff, then bought the wood panels at a lumber store, finished them with a dark stain, and—*voilà!*—eight gorgeous mirrored panels for about \$1,200.

Around the corner from the media room is the garage—albeit not in any tool-filled, oil-stained sense of the word. “The home was designed with a three-car garage,” says Henning, “but I didn’t need all three spaces for cars.” There are two spaces together. One Henning uses for his personal vehicle, and the other he transformed into a work area—a sort of alternate design studio. That left the third area open and, for a time, unused.

“I knew it was a great space,” he recalls, “but for what?” The solution was found when Henning looked back to his native Canada. “In Montreal and Toronto, lots of restaurants have garage doors in front that open onto the street during the summer,” he explains. So the garage space was re-imagined as a lounge area that spills out onto the patio in warmer weather.

With all the work Henning has done on the house, there is still quite a bit more that he wants to do. He’s currently working on a downstairs room that used to be the maid’s quarters, and the master bathroom is in the throes of renovation. But through it all he feels—finally—at home. “I was living in New York on September 11, 2001,” he recalls. “After that, life took on a new focus. I hadn’t really considered Dallas at first, but I love it here now, especially Kessler Park. It’s got natural beauty and diversity and a great sense of community.” Mix all that with your own personal style, and, as Henning has discovered, you’re well on the way to making a house your home.

Henning is partial to mirrors: “They take pieces of a room and focus them in different ways,” he says. Henning made the bed’s headboard (visible in the reflection in the mirror) out of square panels from his old garage door which he covered in green suede.