

STEWARDS OF STYLE

A DESIGNER AND HIS HUSBAND REVAMPED A CLASSIC 1960S HOME
INTO A STUNNING EXPRESSION OF MODERNISM.

By Lauren Finney Harden // Photographed by Galina Juliana Photography





Atlanta is just as well-known for its historic properties as it is for its love of new construction, but it's rare for homeowners to stumble upon a gem of a midcentury modern home. For Willem Stear of Tonic Design Studio LLC and his husband, a Joseph Amisano-designed home felt right from the moment they saw it in 2012.

Tucked back in Brandon, the home was completed in 1972. Stear explains, "The owner and architect was Joseph Amisano of Toombs, Amisano & Wells, known for the Peachtree Center MARTA station, the original Fernbank Museum of Natural History, the original Lenox Square Mall and more. He lived in the home until he passed away in 2008."

As only the second-ever owners of the property, Stear wanted to ensure he did it justice. "We spent the first five years working on the exterior of the home, adding a new roof, landscaping, a garage... we even moved out in 2017 while we did a complete interior renovation." That required basically redrawing the interiors, removing slab to replace the plumbing, electrical and HVAC, resulting in a completely new, light-filled interior.

He brought in friend and architect Frank Neely of Neely Design Associates to renovate, not only because he liked his work, but because Neely had a personal connection to the house. "As a child and a student of architecture, [Amisano] invited me to his house for dinner. His wife cooked in that same kitchen," recalls Neely. "He told me about architecture, sitting right there at that table." Neely acknowledges it was an incredible circle of events and that he went about the renovation and restoration in a deliberate way.

The outdoor patio, with custom cushions by Bjork Studio for entertaining





The dining room features custom Dutchman Furniture woodwork, with art gifted by South African friend Robert Whitehead.



The entryway, featuring art by Lola sourced at Renwil, gives a glimpse into the color play Stear incorporated throughout.

Neely says that a lot of it “we had no interest in changing in any way, and then other parts of it, like the bedrooms and the kitchen, really needed to be modernized. They were just designed for a different age and time.” That meant opening up some rooms and saving others as they were to make them “more akin to modern living.” “We played with the ideas that Joe had, such as where there’s a big view of the creek. We played around the axes that he had thought about. In my perfect world, if he could see it, I’d hope he’d be proud.”

So, where does an interior designer start when tasked with improving upon such an important property? Stear “viewed this as almost a gallery space since the home is basically a series of white boxes. The exterior of the home has always been white, so I felt that by default the interior also had to be white. The overall aesthetic is pretty neutral, but with very deliberate color accents. Just enough to move your eye around,” he says. But even though the interior was new, Stear didn’t abandon the original intention. “Because the home was built in the ’70s, I tried to do a modern interpretation by using period-specific materials like brass, cork, mirror and lots of wood paneling.” Brass fixtures, cork wallcoverings and gorgeous carpentry from Elme van der Klei of Dutchman Furniture dot the home, but it never feels dated.

A lover of modern, Stear also has a fondness for his home country of South Africa. “When it came to



The living room is permeated with hints of green, a thread that runs throughout the home; large glass windows help bring in tons of natural light while offsetting the glass blocking at the front of the home. Art from Leftbank Art anchors the far wall, with an oversize map of Paris in the foreground.





The Poggenpohl-designed galley kitchen feels large thanks to double-height ceilings and a light patterned tile from Specialty Tile Products. Above the dining table is a postcard from a Parisian restaurant called La Tour d'Argent that Stear had framed.

The bedroom is masculine yet elegant. Black-and-white framed posters were purchased in Amsterdam and are by Mark Raven; the Warhol art is from Renwil. Stear's husband, a huge aviation fan, adores the Concorde model bedside. The sitting area opposite the bed is an opportunity for pattern play.





decor, I wanted to have a sense of my home country—just a suggestion of my African heritage,” he says. He accomplished that by incorporating everything from handwoven baskets, Malawi chairs, kudu horns and various textures in a way that is subtle and elegant without being full-frontal. Texture is an important part of Stear’s design, which can be noted everywhere from rich, pliable rugs courtesy of Verde Home to the smooth surface of his Poggenpohl kitchen to the marble mosaic in the powder room.

Stear, rather ingeniously, custom designed all of his upholstered furniture and had it manufactured in South Africa; he also purchased most of his case goods in South Africa to have them done exactly how he wanted them, by artisans in his home country. Accents from local outposts, such as custom rugs from Verde Home and Eve and Staron Studio, or curtains made by Made 2 Measure Design & Upholstery and The Designers’ Workroom, add to the eclectic, international feeling.

While the end result is gorgeous and complete, Stear acknowledges that “the entire project was an unforeseen challenge. Because we were dealing with cinder block and concrete, we didn’t really know what to expect once we removed the layers.” Finding qualified subcontractors well-versed in concrete was also a challenge, in addition to the usual pains of any major renovation. But to Stear, it was all worth it: “We lucked out with a wonderful architect and contractor who was able to put the right team together for us, and at the end, even after all the challenges and the gray hairs, it was an absolute labor of love.” He’s lucky to call it home. ■



DESIGN DETAILS

RESIDENCE

Single-family home

LOCATION

Buckhead

INTERIOR DESIGN

Willem Stear,
Tonic Design Studio LLC
tonic-designstudio.com

RENOVATION ARCHITECT

Frank Neely,
Neely Design Associates
neelydesign.com

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

Davey Construction
404.256.1436

CARPENTER

Elmer van der Klei,
Dutchman Furniture LLC
dutchmanfurniture.com

KITCHEN DESIGNER

John Coutler, Poggenpohl Kitchens
poggenpohl.com

LIGHTING DESIGNER

Sheila Sullins,
Atlanta Lighting Design Inc.
atlantalightingdesign.com

SELECT VENDORS

SPECIALTY TILE PRODUCTS

Kitchen tile
specialtytile.com

VERDE HOME

Custom rugs throughout
verdehomeinc.com

EVE AND STARON STUDIO

Custom rugs throughout
eveandstaron.com

GRIZZEL & MANN

Harlequin wallpaper in living room
grizzelandmann.com

JIM DAVIS DESIGNS

Master bedroom blinds
jimdavisdesigns.com

AQUABRASS

Bathroom fixtures
aquabrass.com

MIELE

Appliances
miele.com