

STYLECOMPASS

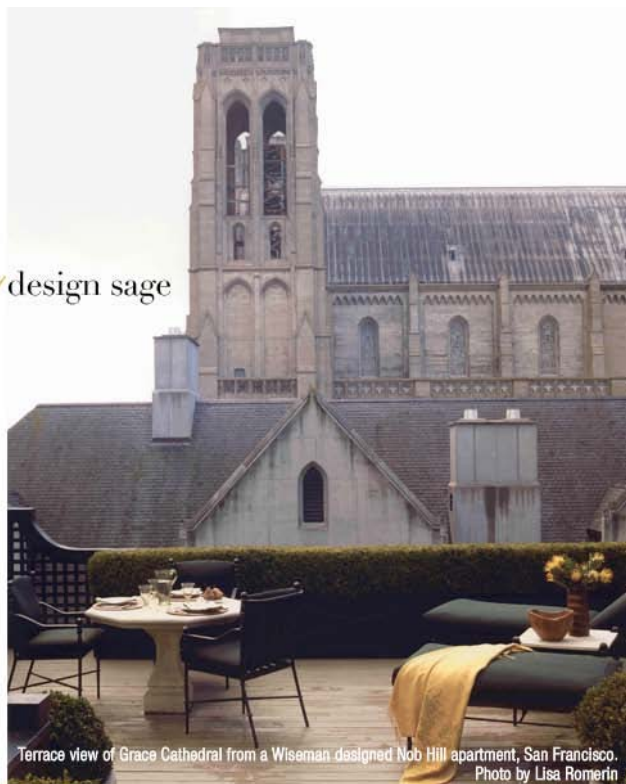
A black and white portrait of Paul Vincent Wiseman. He is a middle-aged man with short, dark, wavy hair, wearing round-rimmed glasses. He is dressed in a dark suit jacket over a white collared shirt. His hands are clasped together in front of him, resting on his lap. The background is dark and textured. The text 'Paul Vincent Wiseman' is overlaid on the lower left side of the image in a large, white, serif font.

Paul Vincent
Wiseman

PHOTO BY THOMAS HEINSER STUDIO

WISE MAN *or* design sage

Paul Wiseman loves a good story. Especially those belonging to other people. He wants to know *all* about their lifestyle (how they live and where they live, as well as what they think about how and where they live); the kind of house they live in (its size, style, location, even its siting), and he's terribly curious about whether or not an architect was used (and if so, which one).



Terrace view of Grace Cathedral from a Wiseman designed Nob Hill apartment, San Francisco.
Photo by Lisa Romerlin



Living room/office. Marin county, California. Photo by Christopher Irton

Is he a Nosey Parker with a highly refined proboscis particular to choice neighborhoods? An especially well-connected and aesthetically interested gossip columnist or blogger? Or perhaps a psychiatrist pioneering an experimental approach to analysis encompassing color theory and curtain rods? Hardly. Wiseman is one of San Francisco and the West Coast's most prominent designers, and his interest in his clients' stories is purely professional. "They are the beginning, the foundation for what we proceed to do; everything comes from their stories," says Wiseman, noting that it is through listening intently to what his clients say, both explicitly and implicitly, that allows him to understand the essence of what they want – even if what a client wants isn't immediately apparent to the client. "Sometimes out of fear a client will hold onto a fixed idea, in an effort to control a process that is by its nature creative and therefore fluid," he adds. "But it's futile, like trying to control feminine energy with a burka."



Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco

In this sense, the stories are strippers, dancing away camouflage and articles superfluous while providing cogent designer imperatives, such as what the client loves and loathes, desires or detests. As importantly, the narratives also lead to a dialogue, which is essential in building a level of trust that Wiseman finds imperative. "Often a client will have the right idea with the wrong implementation." For example, he explains, they'll point to a hideous hue of blue: "But by having taken the time to understand them beyond a superficial level, you can understand more completely what *they're* seeing in that blue, and they'll then trust you to steer them toward a shade that is more appropriate to the environment and surroundings."



A dining room in client's residence, Walnut Grove, California. Photo by Matthew Millman



Client's Residence, Hawaii. Photo by Matthew Millman



Barry Levinson



Michael Tilson Thomas



Steve Fossett

It's a complicated composite involving divination and deduction as much as empirical discovery, but that's how Wiseman rolls. "I'm not interested in imposing a look on a client, or in having a 'Wiseman signature,'" he says, adding that he always underscores to new clients that he is excited to be working with them rather than executing for them. While that approach might not be for the insecure – those who are faint of heart, those who choose not to see a life and lifestyle potentially as art (or at least artistic), or those unwilling to invest requisite amounts of time and dinero – it's worked for the likes equity innovator Charles Schwab, conductor Michael Tilson Thomas, explorer Steve Fossett, and producer-writer-director Barry Levinson (to identify just a few of Wiseman's generally publicity shy clients).



Paul Wiseman with Nancy Goode Power, renowned landscape designer. Photo by Richard Snyder



Client's Hawaii residence. Architect: Ricardo Legorreta. Photo by Matthew Millman

It's also resulted in happy collaborations with renowned architects, such as Ricardo Legorreta, the Mexican master, with whom Wiseman has worked on multiple projects. "The journey," what he calls the client-designer relationship and process that begins with the story, also keeps Wiseman from ever – "Ever!" – becoming bored. "My clients tend to be fascinating individuals and families, innovators and groundbreakers, as well as nice, learned people at the top of their game," he says, his only qualifier being that "sometimes they don't understand just how much of their time is required to get the result they want, how much of themselves they must put into what we're doing, and how much time can be required to execute some of the ideas." (One recent example gives a rough idea of the amount of client hours prospectively required, as well as the reward for such an investment: a series of ten carpets manufactured by V'soske, which Wiseman and his clients designed around a "lost images of history" concept that translates to "Italian parterres, hedges and gardens, Persian and Asian rugs, and books – all things my clients love. Then we played with scale, dimension and color," he says).

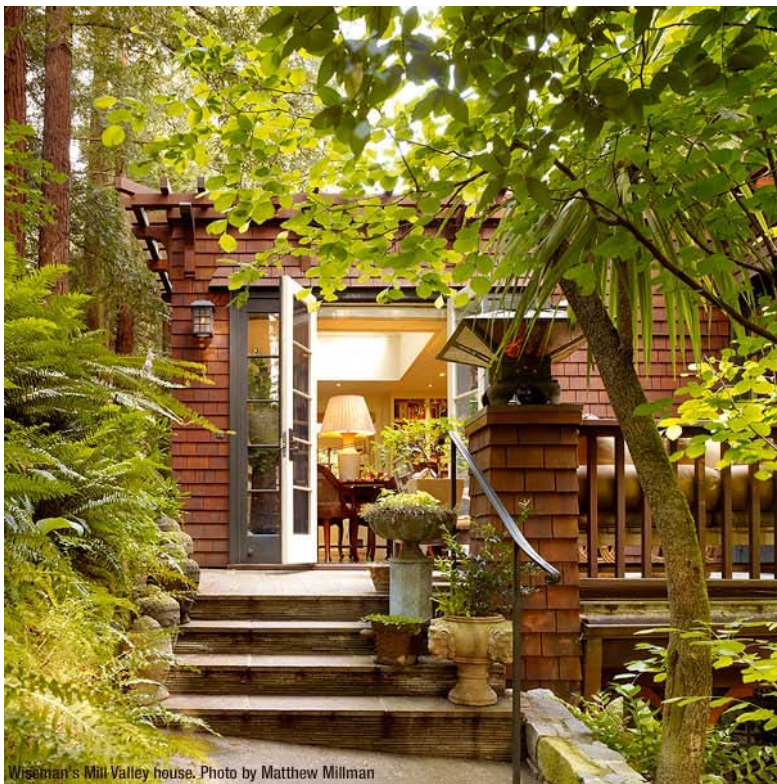


Dining room in Paul Wiseman's (former) San Francisco apartment. Photo by Tim Street-Porter



San Francisco Decorator's Showcase House 1996. Photo by David Livingston

What, then, is Wiseman's own story, the component he brings to a project's mosaic? The facts are these: He's a California-born descendent of a clan whose American arrival dates back to 1740 (when forbearer William Wiseman touched ground in Massachusetts); he grew up on a pear farm between Sacramento and San Francisco; he studied at the University of California, both the Berkeley and Davis campuses; he worked for various furniture companies, antiques dealers and interior designers (such as San Francisco's Robert Hering and Sue Fisher King) before starting his own business in 1980; he is an effective businessman who twenty years ago employed an innovative organizational model by dividing the Wiseman Group into design principles, senior designers, managers and assistants, each of whom are assigned to different projects at different levels with Wiseman acting as the all-seeing editor-in-chief ("I believe a collective process generally yields the best design," Wiseman says); he's a quick wit with a soft touch: "It's a joke in the office that I never reject an idea; I'll simply say, 'Wow! Great! Let's save that one for another job!'; he's also Kermit the Frog green, "There are high quality green alternatives for everything these days, finishes, wood, furniture, lighting. It's not perfect, not yet, but it's fast improving," he says, adding that his mantra to himself and to clients is "Just because you can doesn't mean you should."



Wiseman's Mill Valley house. Photo by Matthew Millman



"Butler" in the gardens of Wiseman's Mill Valley home

As compelling are the rich threads with which Wiseman has chosen to weave his story. Those include yarns and histories gleaned from his collection of over 8,000 books, including first editions from the likes of Somerset Maugham, auction catalogues and designers' and architects' monographs, most kept in his favorite room, the library of a Mill Valley "summer" house built in 1880, which he shares with his partner of 22 years, Richard Snyder, and where he explains, "I read the words of giants surrounded by giant 200-foot redwoods." Collections of minerals; paintings by Bay Area artists; porcelain, Majolica and pottery; and Japanese print erotica, some pieces dating to the 1600s, are also edifying passions.



Hawaiian residence. Photo by Matthew Millman



Paul Wiseman at the Grand Canyon

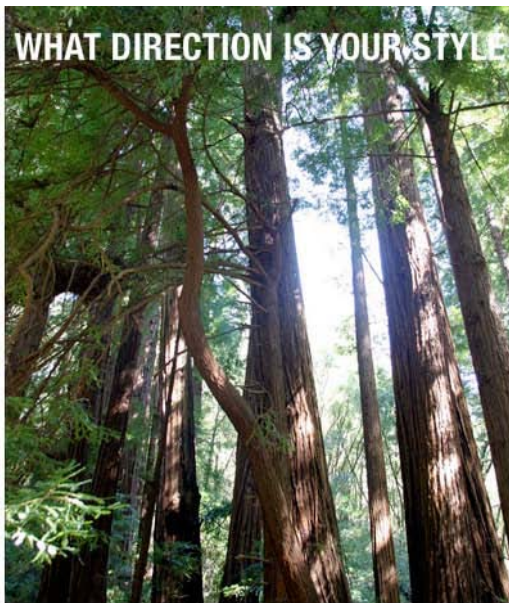
Then there's travel, frequent and far-flung, which began with a post high school, three-month European tour in which he clocked over 12,000 car miles in England, France, Germany, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria; continued during college when Wiseman spent his junior year in Australia at the University of Tasmania followed by a six-month pan-Asian odyssey; and continue to this day, "Over three decades later!" says the 56-year-old [he turned 56 in July].

Stories complex, stories simple. Both work for Wiseman, the requirements only being they be collaborative, unique, meaningful, and therefore, beautiful.

HOW GREEN ARE YOU?

As green as our clients will let us be. We always give the option... and we are always looking for greener materials to design with. We have always focused on sustainability. This year, we have held orientation sessions with our staff and our local network of custom-vendors. To everyone we work with, we distributed the book, *Cradle to Cradle*, which is the defining work by William McDonough on where we've come from and where we need to go in terms of eco-effectiveness. More than just telling our vendors what we need or what our clients want, we're asking our vendors to educate us on the best materials and most sustainable resource options. In our meeting with one of our best furniture makers, I learned about their construction of a "green chair" where they chose sustainable and responsible materials from the frame to the glue to the pillow fill. They hadn't considered more eco-friendly spring material, but were going to look into it as a result of our meeting. I'm having two custom sofas made from these materials for my own home.

WHAT DIRECTION IS YOUR STYLE



COLORS: The first thing I see in the morning is the green canopy of redwood trees outside my window. I love green and I love yellow – but I work with all colors – staying open to what my clients like and what is appropriate for the environment. What's meaningful to me, even with a moderate plane of color, is to rely on texture and tone.

COMPASS POINTED TO?

FASHION: Never trendy and always looking to see if something new emerges that can be applied to our art forum. A favorite I have been wearing for the past few years is Eskandar, although I understand that he has recently discontinued his men's collection. I love his designs for the comfortable loose fit which have a formal enough style to wear to the office. Another favorite of mine are shirts by Issey Miyake. What a designer with such a past: a survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima when he was just a young boy. When I look at a Miyake piece, I think of history and his great artistry. I especially admire his use of beautiful fabrics.



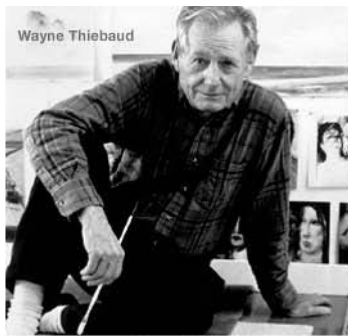
Issey Miyake

TRAVEL:

Do I travel? Not as much...*stdibs* does the traveling for me! Seriously, I have traveled extensively, but one of the most inspirational places I've been, and that I keep going back to, is the Grand Canyon. I don't have to change a thing! – every color is perfect, very rock is in its right place, everything is perfect. Along those lines – years ago, I visited Bhutan where I was told that before you build your house, you must consult with your monks to be sure that your home is in right relation to nature. I kept remarking to a guide, who was helping us on our tour, that all the buildings seemed to be grouped in perfect proportion – two over here, three over there, etc. He didn't understand my question at first, but then told me about the planning process. It's fundamental feng shui.

ART & DESIGN:

I try to stay open to everything. I view architecture as art, as does my friend Frank Gehry whose work has demonstrated this relationship. Frank is really an artist first, and then an architect. I have had the great privilege of working with Ricardo Legorreta who is also an artist first, but from a different angle. As an influence on my life, I also think of the artist Wayne Thiebaud. He lived in my home town when I was growing up. We all thought he was kind of “out there” but in retrospect I realize that seeing his work opened my eyes to color and form. Lately, Richard Diebenkorn's work has been influencing me in my carpet designs.



FABRICS:

We are always looking for more sustainable fabrics and the industry is making huge strides. I have always loved the simplicity of linen, and we have been using hemp rugs in California and Hawaii projects. One fabric in front of me right now is a Robert Kime linen which has subtle prints and soft hues intended to look naturally faded. This fabric is perfect for a bedroom on one of our current projects. The other focus that always fascinates me is the beautiful embroidery that some of our favorite workrooms produce. We love adding an interesting layer to a room with embroidery or even emphasizing part of an existing fabric pattern and giving it an extra layer of dimension which can personalize a space as well.

ENTERTAINING:

I love to cook at home. A perfect day begins with a Sunday morning visit to the Farmer's Market in Marin County where I purchase beautifully fresh ingredients to prepare an all afternoon brunch for my friends and guests. My favorite surprise is serving sautéed stinging nettles with a superb fish dish. So staying at home always works, or going out to one of the latest “great find” restaurants which serve delicious food at a good value. We're lucky in the Bay Area to have lots of these choices.

GARDENING / FLORAL:

I have two gardens – one of ferns and greenery under a redwood canopy in Mill Valley (southern Marin County) and one sunny, succulent Mediterranean garden on Belvedere Island (across the bay from San Francisco). They keep me busy! I love to garden in the morning before going into the office. The succulent garden has been evolving, since we live in a drought stricken area. So, I've replaced my roses and other water hogs. I do enjoy the beautiful shapes and variety of succulents. They're green in color and green in sustainability. As for flowers, I do my own. If I weren't a decorator, I could have been a florist!

Museum: Sir John Soane – London

Restaurant: Zuni Café – San Francisco

Hotel: Any Aman anywhere

Book: Mikhail Bulgakov's – *Master & Margarita*



Silver ginkgo leaf
from Zaragoza



Zuni Café, San Francisco



Sue Fisher King,
San Francisco

Music CD: Michael Jackson's "Thriller." When the news of his death was all over the media, I put this album on and remembered how much I loved all of these songs

GIFT: Silver Ginkgo Leaf – from Zaragoza – San Anselmo, California

Stores: Sue Fisher King – San Francisco; and Joan B. Mirviss in New York for modern Japanese pottery

A Pair of 20th Century Cube Tables by Renzo Mongiardino. Italy, circa 1960. Branca



Pair of bronze Ginkgo leaf candlesticks by Marc Bankowsky. France. Maison Gerard

A rare 1930's 6 Seater Teak Garden Table Designed by Ambrose Heal. England, 1930's. Andrew Nebbett



19th Century Japanese Side Table/Night Stand Tansu. Dos Gallos



Set of eight modernist Jeanne de Lanux dining chairs. France/USA, 1930s. Modest Designs



Paul Wiseman's

SIX QUICK PICKS

from *Istdibs*

Rare Walter Lamb bronze rocking chair. United States, 1940's. Red

