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NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

DESIGN

STYLEMAKER SPOTLIGHT:
GEOFFREY DE SOUSA

Modern design with a nod to the past

By Anh-Minh Le
SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

At first glance, Geoffrey De Sousa's striking interiors appear decidedly modern. But closer inspection reveals rooms that simultaneously infuse a sense of warmth and history. It's no doubt the influence of his upbringing: He grew up in a traditional Colonial in Massachusetts, and during his college years he spent summers working on brownstones as well as at furniture companies such as the historic Hitchcock Chair.

"I love to create urbane, curated, modern homes that also give a nod to the past, and which speak to the passions of the owners," said De Sousa. In a dining room, for example, he surrounded a modern Parsons table with sculptural Klismos chairs.

In the mid-1990s, De Sousa moved to San Francisco to work as the design director at Agnes Bourne Inc. There he met his future business partner, Erik Hughes. The pair established the highly regarded De Sousa Hughes showroom in 1999 (www.desousahughes.com). That same year, De Sousa launched his eponymous interior design practice (www.geoffreydesousa.com).

His current projects include a Beaux Arts mansion in Pacific Heights (a collaboration with Butler Armsden Architects and construction firm Thompson Brooks), and the remodel of a classic 1920s Russian Hill penthouse that he previously worked on a decade ago.

During the course of his career, De Sousa's designs have graced the pages of Architectural Digest, House Beautiful, Traditional Home and California Home + Design. While the recognition is flattering, the most rewarding aspect of his work is less tangible: "Seeing how a well-designed space can positively influence someone's daily life," he said.

E-mail comments to home@sfcronicle.com.

The De Sousa cheat sheet

On finding inspiration: "Review your favorite photos — the ones that really bring a smile to your face. What about the image creates a mood or feeling you'd like to re-live? Is it the setting, a piece of art or the paint color in your grandmother's kitchen? Surround yourself with whatever evokes that smile."

File it away: "Start to compile inspiration files. Pull images from books and magazines and dog-ear them, mark them with Post-it notes, scan them. After you've been collecting images for a while you'll start to see a common thread."

Get the picture: "Use your camera phone, wherever, whenever, to snap inspiring images."

The importance of travel: "Travel out of the country, in the country, in your hometown ... immerse yourself in different cultures. Get out of your comfort zone. Be aware of your surroundings and how they affect you in both positive and negative ways."

Beauty is in the details: "Live with beauty; appreciate, live with and use beautiful things in your daily life. These days there are so many exquisite possibilities — from fine art to functional objects. There are also so many unique local artists and purveyors here in the Bay Area. A small painting from Lost Art Salon, a colorful pillow from Lotus Bleu or a bud vase from Heath Ceramics are all inexpensive, lovely sources of inspiration and beauty." (www.lostartsalon.com, www.lotusbleudesign.com, www.heathceramics.com)



Russell Yip / The Chronicle

A few favorites

Christian Astugue-vieille: "Christian's work has an amazing sculptural quality, and I love his play on classic French and African shapes."



Matthew Millman



Apollonia Morrill

My photography collection: "It includes work by Michael Wolf, Apollonia Morrill, Rick Chapman, Davis & Davis and Julius Shulman. My partner and I are drawn to subject matter that ranges from the clean lines of modern architecture to elements of nature. Rick Chapman's photo of an oak tree in Vermont during the height of the fall foliage always takes me back to that wonderful time in New England."

Jonathan Browning Lighting: "What more needs to be said about the Keule Crystal Pendant? Soft light, crystal and bronze ... it's the perfect jewelry for your living room!" (jonathanbrowninginc.com)



Sharon Risedorph