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PASSION Project

For his first home, an Atlanta tastemaker composes a magically moody and daringly inventive abode.

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Atelier Vime's rattan Medici pedestal from Pierre Frey brings scale and gravitas to the sun room of this 1926 Atlanta home. A checkered rug from Moattar grounds an Ochre Snooze sofa and J Liston Design cocktail table, both from R Hughes.



Although not a designer himself, Steven Leonard is no stranger to the upper echelons of the design industry. As co-owner of Atlanta's R Hughes, one of the country's leading trade showrooms, Steven helps curate some of the most

forward-thinking furniture, lighting and textile collections in the Southeast.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the tastemaker's own home would serve as a showcase for his curatorial eye. Perhaps less anticipated, however, is the extent to which it's also become a playground for unexpected creative expressions. "Designing a space that reflects who I am was a luxury I'd never had previously," he confides. "I saw this house as a big experiment that I get to live in, and I loved that."

Steven located the perfect canvas for his concept in Atlanta's historic Morningside neighborhood. Built in 1926, the abode boasted great bones, but its elegant framework had been obscured by several renovations over the years. Still, he saw raw potential in its simplicity: "I kept looking at it, thinking, 'this could be amazing.'"

General contractor John Willis became instrumental in bringing the homeowner's ideas for the redo to life. Keeping the existing footprint intact, the duo gutted the house down to its framing and installed a full suite of modern mechanical systems. Subsequent updates included revamping the stairs, adding bathrooms, swapping the locations of the kitchen and dining room, and building out a luxurious new coffee bar to adjoin the cooking space. Steven then adorned these complementary areas with cabinetry touting cinnamon-colored lacquer and bluestone countertops.

"This home was one of the more unique projects we've had the pleasure of working on," says Willis, whose colleague, general contractor Chris Shannon, collaborated with Steven on site. Post-renovation, "The home maintained its classic exterior, but the interior was transformed into a clean, modern space."

To unify the interior, the homeowner deployed an adventurous mix of moody colors, curvy silhouettes and dramatic gestures. In the living room, an inky-toned rounded sofa with bullion fringe bids a flirtatious "hello" the moment you enter. Behind it, prima alpaca draperies form a theatrical proscenium arch around the kitchen

doorway, an effect repeated on the opposite wall. Plastering the fireplace surround with the same rich charcoal tone as the draperies established a sense of cohesion, completing the room's shadowy lounge aesthetic.

Steven cheekily compares the overall color story to a "Waffle House palette," offering a nod to local lore. To wit, gold, ochre and rust accents animate the slate backdrop—not unlike a harvest of leaves dancing across a midnight sky. "I've always been drawn to smoke-stained spaces and sepia tones," the homeowner notes. "So, I knew this house would be very fall in feeling."

That autumnal vibe is perhaps best captured in the dining room, where leaf-peeping is encouraged thanks to a panoramic mural of a tree-filled pastoral scene. In a feat of pure design derring-do, Steven eschewed the expected furniture plan—that is, a table and chairs floating in the center of the room—in favor of something a little less conventional. Here, a saffron-hued biomorphic sectional hugs the wall, functioning as a supersize banquette. "Pushing the seating against the wall allowed for better flow and more space to accommodate lots of people for entertaining," he says.

While the home perfectly reflects his tastes, Steven was quick to lean on industry comrades—including architect Bobby McAlpine and designer Susan Ferrier—for advice about the more technical aspects of its design. "Getting that expert insight was invaluable," the homeowner assures. Similarly, having excellent relationships with vendors meant that Steven could cherry-pick pieces from the blue-chip brands he and showroom namesake, Ryan Hughes, represent. These selections mingle with Steven's treasured collection of art, which includes photography by Bastiaan Woudt and paintings by late Alabama folk artist Mose Tolliver, plus a significant piece by outsider-art pioneer Thornton Dial.

This eclectic mix not only reveals Steven's unique point of view, but also conveys a sentiment close to his heart: that contemporary design has a place in the historical Southern home. "Part of my job, beyond bringing these collections to Atlanta, is to display them in a way that's inspiring alongside more classic design elements," he explains. "My house is an example of how, when you place something modern in an older home, it can still feel comfortable, appropriate and maybe a little bit exciting." ■

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—STEVEN LEONARD





Coup Studio's curvaceous Oasis sofa—upholstered in Holland & Sherry wool with Houliès bullion fringe trim—commands center stage in the living room. Sandra Jordan Prima Alpaca draperies, fabricated by Douglass Workroom, provide a backdrop for Adam Otlewski sconces.





Above: A Marc Sijan resin sculpture of hands tying a pair of tennis shoes playfully punctuates a customized version of Ikseel's Arcadia mural, which envelops the dining room in bucolic scenery. BassamFellows' Brutus side chair stands beside a vintage chest from Schwung Home.

Opposite: The kitchen's Urban Archeology pendants illuminate a BassamFellows tractor stool near a vintage work table from Bobo Intriguing Objects. Roman shades of Muriel Brandolini striped cotton from Holland & Sherry complement a backsplash of Marmi soapstone.



Right: Seen from the second-floor stair landing, Holland & Sherry's Glace wool wallcovering creates a moody environment for Coup Studio's Celestial chandelier. Mill & Woods' Old Forrester American white oak flooring runs underfoot.

Opposite: Sherwin-Williams' Darkroom coats the den, where a Sea Urchin pendant and sheepskin Sling chair, both by Coup Studio, join the Lee Industries sectional and Natasha Baradaran leather cocktail table. Ochre sconces flank a Michele Mikesell artwork.





Right: The guest bathroom's tile from Floor & Decor and café curtains of C&C Milano terry cloth accompany a Waterworks pedestal sink and faucet. An Apparatus sconce coordinates with the RH medicine cabinet.

Opposite: A duvet of Zak+Fox's Obi cotton accentuates a Rejuvenation bed in the guest room, where Romo wool draperies cloak a corner in a rusty hue. The bedside chest is by Wigü Studios.

