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BRILLIANT BUILT-INS
AND UNEXPECTED
FINISHES



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RATHER THAN DOING A “HIPSTER FLIP” ON HER VICTORIAN HOME, DESIGNER GREY CROWELL PLAYED UP ITS HISTORIC PATINA—AND THE RESULT IS A DREAMY SPACE FOR HER CREATIVE GATHERINGS.

Written by AMARA HOLSTEIN • Photographed by CARLA RICHMOND COFFING





The centerpiece of Grey Crowell's remodeled 1906 Victorian is the old wallpaper and plaster that she discovered under layers of paint. "You have only one chance to expose and preserve those details before they're gone," she says. Flourishes of rose and sage green match the walls in the living room, with its hemp linen window coverings sourced from Whole 9 Yards, an '80s Deco-style lamp she sourced on Etsy, and a mid-century couch upholstered in rose corduroy that she found at the Estate Store in Portland. The floors are original to the house.

DESIGN TEAM

interiors: **Foundation for Architecture and Design**
construction and carpentry: **CitiLites Builders**
carpentry: **Byerly Remodeling, Bill Hynes**
custom woodworking: **Western Index**



When designer Grey Crowell, then a college student, bought a modest Victorian house on a quiet North Portland street a decade ago, she intended to simply tweak its interiors. A little paint here, some new fixtures there—that sort of thing. Over the years, as her house became a hip hangout for her friends, Crowell slowly chipped away at improvements. Even as she hosted bands in her dining room and let a friend live in a teepee in her backyard, she pulled up the brown shag carpeting and scraped the walls, which she says “had a really heavy ’70s brown spackle texture. They were gnarly.”

In 2009, Crowell moved to New York and then to Paris. “I honed my tastes in Europe,” she says, “and discovered a love for early-20th-century furniture and design.” Next Los Angeles beckoned for architecture school, and after

graduating in 2013, she spent a few years doing remodels for a real estate developer there and showing her multimedia artwork at local galleries. All the while, she continued to tinker with her Portland house, flying up from Los Angeles whenever she could and renting out the place to artist friends.

Last year, she started her own firm, the Foundation for Architecture and Design, and hired a contractor for a minor remodel of her house. “Not that much,” she says of her initial plans. But just before work began, her contractor called to tell her that water had been gushing out of the bathroom for two weeks. With water literally dripping through the floors, “what was supposed to be a minor remodel became a major one,” says Crowell. “The flood changed everything.”

In L.A., she’d spent her time doing “hipster flips,” as she calls them—turning old houses into clean, modern »

"I love playing with circles and squares in design," says Crowell. That's especially evident in the dining room, where the graceful curves of an 1890s J. & J. Kohn bentwood bench from Portland's Grand Marketplace (opposite), as well as a vintage brass bar cart and the designer's own clay sculpture (this page), are set against the strong lines of the geometric paneling and built-ins that Crowell added. The gray paint is Burnished Tudor, from Miller Paint Co.'s Evolution line.



"I'd been craving a chance to put in details that other people leave out. It's really important for me to maintain that level of detail in all my work and make places come alive."

—GREY CROWELL, DESIGNER





Upstairs, natural light streams through new Velux skylights onto walls painted in Miller Paint Co.'s Sealskin Shadow. Plenty of plants, a bentwood bamboo chair, and vintage Turkish angora-mohair tulu rugs add texture and warmth to the rooms. "My sister calls my style 'modern monastic,'" Crowell says with a laugh. Nine-inch baseboard moldings provide quiet drama.

TOP RIGHT: In an upstairs guest room, a curvy vintage mirror and revealed bits of wallpaper adorn the otherwise-bare walls.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Crowell is fond of making little vignettes out of design elements, as in the downstairs bathroom, where the architectural detail on a new built-in makes stacked towels and a simple vase look special.

blank slates. But Crowell decided to “do something more surgical in my house, to uncover layers and see where they guided the design. In Europe, there are houses with old stone walls, with layers upon layers and odd bits chopped off. In the U.S., some people push that look too far, and it becomes shabby chic. But there’s a point at which the look is really elegant—I’m interested in that border between antique and kitsch.”

Peeling away the many layers of paint in the living room, Crowell discovered old wallpaper attached to the underlying plaster walls with a wash of greenish glue. Rather than cover them up, she exposed the layers of glue, plaster, and wallpaper and sealed them with a matte acrylic lacquer, preserving their dusky pinks and greens. Similarly, she revealed flashes of old wallpaper in the upstairs bedrooms and hallway, like islands of history surfacing amid the newly pristine white walls.

Despite the home’s Victorian vintage, it had “no architectural detailing, no molding or trim,” says Crowell. “I had to add everything.” Riffing off an original doorway molding (the home’s sole ornamentation), Crowell created geometric paneling throughout the downstairs to contrast with the old wallpaper, “allowing for something messy and raw to sit within something very controlled and clean.”

Indeed, the whole house is a study in well-matched contrasts, rustic vintage furnishings and details commingling with new finishes and chic minimal style. Original Douglas fir floors, roughly sanded, flow throughout, complemented by gallery-white walls (the elegant gray in the dining room is an exception; “I wanted it to feel more formal,” Crowell says).

After nine months of remodeling, Crowell’s house is finished at last. She rents it to visiting creatives to fund her fledging design firm and a new house that she’s building in L.A. But the Portland house still holds a place in her heart. “I used it to express my work,” she says. “Hipster flips suck the character out of houses. I’d been craving a chance to put in details that other people leave out. Now it’s really important for me to maintain that level of detail in all my work and make places come alive.” * ❀

