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# *REINVENTING HISTORY*

A 1920S PORTLAND HOME PRESERVES THE PAST BUT MAKES WAY FOR THE FUTURE WITH COMFORTABLE FURNISHINGS, CUSTOM FINISHES AND MODERN AMENITIES.

WRITTEN BY BRIAN LIBBY PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID PAPAIZAN

**INTERIOR DESIGN** Heidi Semler, Heidi Semler Interior Design, LLC  
**KITCHEN AND BATH DESIGN** Michelle Vranizan, Michelle Vranizan Interior Design, LLC  
**HOME BUILDER** Brian Bohrer and Jeff Bohrer, Cornerstone Construction Services, LLC  
**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE** Craig Kiest, Huntington and Kiest Landscape Architects  
**BEDROOMS 6 | BATHROOMS 5 | SQUARE FEET 8,000**

When a husband and wife pair left the Portland area a little more than a decade ago, their friend and designer Heidi Semler had a feeling the couple would come back. "And they did," Semler remembers. Upon returning, the two asked her to help decide among four houses, including a historic Jacobethan-style brick home on a ridge above Portland's downtown skyline. "I immediately said, 'That's it!' It was this amazing classic beauty," she says.

Completed in 1922, the Leon Hirsch residence by acclaimed architects Sutton & Whitney is praised in the book *Classic Houses of Portland, Oregon, 1850-1950* for its old-world elegance, from a crenellated parapet above banked second-floor windows to the Tudor-arched recessed entry. So while the Morgans wanted a home to fit their contemporary lifestyle, they also wanted to respect its original architecture. They spent a few years living in the house before undertaking many of the renovations, to develop a sense of what changes were needed. "It's been a labor of love over several years," the husband explains. "We've really tried to not only appreciate the architecture and history, but in some cases bring it back to an appropriate finish."

Enter brother-builder team Brian Bohrer and Jeff Bohrer, who came on board to oversee the preservation and construction elements. Original oak floors were restored, for example, and the profile of the existing crown molding was specially replicated in some areas and custom-magnified in the kitchen and butler's pantry for an updated slant. Even the original cast-iron radiators were retained and restored, and



The living room sofas, covered in Rogers & Goffigon fabric, are by JJ Custom. They're complemented with Restoration Hardware's tufted chairs, accented with colorful Zimmer + Rohde pillow fabric, and a custom ottoman from Michael Talbert Upholstery in Edelman Leather cow print. A sea-grass Stark area rug grounds the sun-drenched setting.



A covered outdoor patio was walled off for the newly appointed dining room, which is anchored by a Ballard Designs country French table and chairs clad in Kathryn M. Ireland Textiles & Design fabric. The Baccarat chandelier was original to the home and was moved from the old dining room.



Countertops from EleMar Oregon support the light, bright overtone of the kitchen, with its creamy custom cabinetry and range hood by Pilgrim's Custom Cabinets and Construction. Classic Brass embellishments from Chown Hardware add glints of warmth. The Wolf range is from Eastbank Contractor Appliances.



Above: The preserved butler's pantry is enlivened by a 19<sup>th</sup>-century C. Casbah crystal chandelier acquired through Restoration Hardware and an Ann Sacks antiqued-mirror backsplash. The Rohl faucet is from The Fixture Gallery. Left: Blue-and-white porcelain from Curated by M+M stands out against Sonoma Tilemakers subway tiles from United Tile.

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paired with a new high-efficiency boiler that has reduced heating bills by two-thirds. "The attention to detail that exists in this house is stunning: the woodwork, moldings and plaster," Brian says. "It's so grand."

Rather than gutting the kitchen, pantry and butler's pantry into one wide-open space, designer Michelle Vranizan, who worked for Semler at the start of the project and later returned to the home to design the kitchen and bathrooms after establishing her own firm, used the pantries to hide modern-day appliances but clad the kitchen with period-appropriate details such as white tile backsplashes and unlacquered brass fixtures. She also chose reflective surfaces such as quartzite countertops to help spread the light. "The thing the owner said when we started out was she wanted it to feel happy," Vranizan remembers. "For me, being a native Oregonian, happy to me is sunlight, and we've got to maximize it where we live."



One goal was to create an indoor-outdoor feel for the house, says landscape architect Craig Kiest. The new entry patio speaks to that aesthetic and shows off the original architectural details, including a Tudor-style recessed entry bookended by Paul Ferrante light fixtures purchased in Los Angeles.



The home's original oak floors were restored, while an antique horse statue—procured from a Paris Hermès store via a Seattle antique shop—and outdoor planters help add whimsy and bring the outside in.



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Semler's design focused on adding light and color to public areas and bedrooms. "The house is really voluminous, so we wanted warmth," she says. In the living room, for instance, cinnamon and cranberry tones were chosen for the sofas and other furniture, complementing the white fireplace. Upstairs, taking inspiration from the greenery outside, light turquoise wallpaper in the master bedroom gives way to a bright, yellow-toned landing.

Living and family rooms flank a Roman column-lined foyer. The family room previously housed the dining room, which was relocated to the back of the ground floor beside the kitchen, in a converted former covered brick patio. There, floor-to-ceiling glass French doors bring in a bounty of sunshine, thereby turning the dining room's Baccarat crystal chandelier into a prism of rainbow color.

A yellow palette brightens the upper hall, which features an antique French country table from Marquess of Granby Lake Oswego. Designer Heidi Semler had vintage candlesticks rewired to become table lamps, with shades made using Raoul Textiles fabric. Botanicals add dainty touches alongside blue-and-white porcelain.



The covered backyard patio, off of the dining room, provides the chance to enjoy Oregon's mild but rainy climate year-round, while also celebrating its classic Jacobethan architecture of arches and columns.





A thin custom vanity with a mirrored top was created to maintain the original master bath's footprint. Polished Carrara marble from Oregon Tile & Marble lends fresh appeal to the vanity. A sconce from Restoration Hardware is one of a pair that helps light the room.



In the master bedroom, Semler used a textured light turquoise Scalamandré wallpaper to complement the leafy view outside and mixed in bright floral pillow and chair coverings by Raoul Textiles to add color. The pattern of the Stark carpet adds interest underfoot.

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In the house's front, landscape architect Craig Kiest removed overgrown rhododendrons and added a small terrace, so the homeowners can entertain there in addition to the backyard, enjoying a view of the downtown skyline through a veil of German boxwood plants and Lavalle hawthorns. "We wanted to make the house more inside-outside," Kiest explains, "and to use what would have been planted in the era of the house, rather than these new trees that haven't been in common cultivation until recently."

Given new life, this Roaring Twenties house is ready for the new millennium: not just as historic renovation, but as an inviting modern home. "It's traditional and classic, but it's also a house that offers surprises: something unexpected," Semler says, maintaining her original thought: "It's just a beauty." **L**