

A MODERNE

ROOMS THAT CURVE!

VINTAGE TREASURES!

When Ann Wilson and Mark Lawton left their 2,200-square-foot flat in a Victorian near San Francisco, they couldn't have imagined this 1,300-square-foot cutie as their next urban nest.

BY J.B. RABIN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SALLY SCHOOLMASTER



MIX

1940S PALETTE!

"My husband likes to drive up to the house from *that* direction," says Ann Wilson, pointing to her left, "just so he can see the colors from that angle. I like how the colors are soothing in a colorful way." House painter Michael Tunson helped select the seven colors and applied the paint to the house.



WHILE DRIVING THROUGH THE meandering, tree-lined streets of Portland's Eastmoreland neighborhood, you get a sense of how Ann Wilson's and Mark Lawton's home defies convention, even before you set foot in it. Nestled among the traditional assortment of expansive Colonials and Tudors, their 1,300-square-foot, moderne house boasts undulating walls and no less than seven different colors of paint on its facade.

"Did I show you the pictures of the house before we had it repainted?" asks Wilson. "It was basically two shades: gray—and gray! We slaved over picking new colors. We put up samples of each color on the walls and our neighbors would walk by and say, 'So which color are you going to go with?' And we'd say, 'All of them!'"

Lawton mentions a restaurant near their old house in the San Francisco Bay area that got so many written complaints about the paint job that the owner started posting them on the building. "I thought that I was going to end up posting all these letters from the neighbors," says Lawton.

"But they like it," says Wilson. "And we like it."

The colors—which range from mustard to salmon-orange and muted blue-green—were designed to move your eye in a logical progression. "It's almost as if the *light* changes rather than the color

changes," says Wilson. "The house looks different with every season."

Wilson, who has a background in photography and interior design, found this 1937 jewel during a house-hunting trip in 2001. At the time, she and Lawton were sharing a 2,200-square-foot Victorian flat and had no rational reason to relocate. "We had an idea that got out of control," says Wilson, with a laugh. "We wanted to move to Portland—and then we did." The couple shares their home with Wilson's son, Cole, and cats Pambo and Treenie.

Despite its dated interior, Wilson could see that the bones of the house were good and she brought Lawton with her on

a second trip.

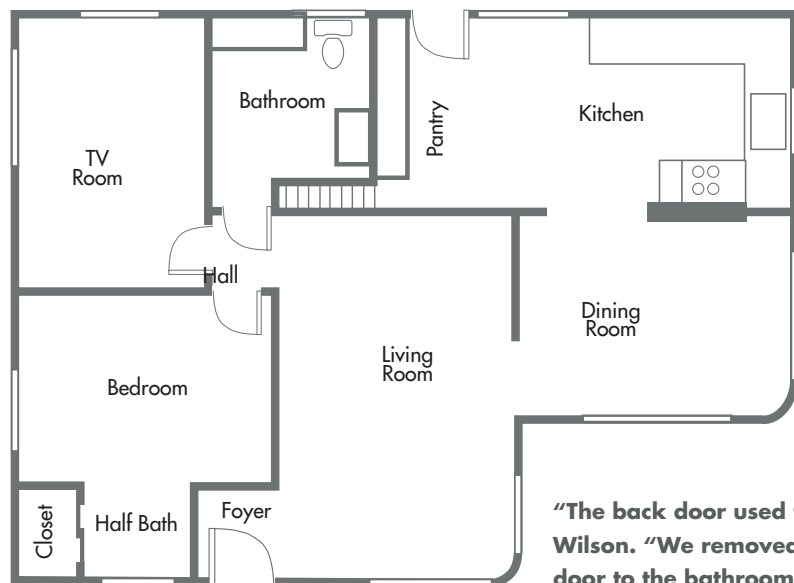
"She's better at seeing through other people's wallpaper and paint colors," he says. "That stuff has more of an influence on my opinion of a house." What eventually sold him on the place, aside from his wife's vision, was seeing one of Portland's most beautiful neighborhoods through the house's many oversized picture windows.

NOW THAT THE HOUSE IS DONE, not even the view can compete with the décor for your attention. Describing Wilson and Lawton's taste as eclectic is like saying that Willy Wonka is "slightly quirky."

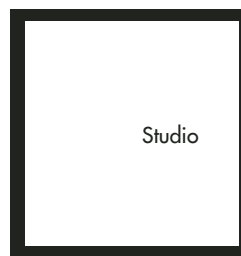
The couple tops a Turkish rug with salmon Nautica chairs or juxtaposes an antique Japanese tea cabinet with a dental sterilizer turned sideboard and display case. On the wall above the sterilizer, masonite letters spell out EAT. In any other dining room, it would be rhetorical, but in this house, you can't assume that anyone would be wasting their time with food when there's an entire collection of vintage buttons and Bend-A-Family dolls waiting to be discovered on a perforated steel shelf

Ann Wilson (center) with son Cole and husband Mark Lawton

MAIN LEVEL



STUDIO



"The back door used to open onto a narrow hall that had five doors," says Wilson. "We removed the wall between the hall and kitchen, took out the door to the bathroom and made a pantry out of some of the new space."

that's suspended a few inches beneath the glass top of the dining room table.

Wilson and Lawton rarely use furnishings for the purposes they were originally intended. They've reappointed far more than just the dental equipment sterilizer and the dining room table for display purposes. Take, for example, the living room bookshelves, which would be boring if they housed, say, books. They've been reassigned to show off a collection of antique bug sprayers. Lawton found the first one in an antiques shop in Greenwich Village. "It was a long time before we got a second one," he says, "and then they started multiplying." And the antique adding machine that Wilson picked up at a Portland auction in honor of Lawton's job as a math and science teacher functions as the kitchen telephone stand. The couple uses a

steel medical cabinet as a bureau in their master bedroom.

Though their overall aesthetic is difficult to define—ethnic-retro-mod-americana-vintage-with-a-heaping-tablespoon-of-whimsy scratches the surface—Lawton says that there *is* an overarching theme. "Ann has a rule: The No Ugly Anything Rule," he says. "You can't buy something if it doesn't look nice. Like, we can't have a pen if it's ugly. If I do get anything ugly it ends up in my closet."

Unfortunately, the fireplace's original tile hearth was too big to fit in Lawton's closet. He and Wilson had to put their heads together and figure out how they could keep it from breaking Ann's most important rule. It was too big a job to take out the tile, so they had TK Hershberger of Tk Metalworks in northwest Portland fabricate a steel tray with the

exact measurements as the tiled area, which they use to obscure it. The tray holds recycled, tumbled glass shards, atop which sits a collection of balls including, but not limited to, a bowling ball, a mini soccer ball, a bocce ball, a hackysack, a golf ball and a ping pong ball displayed in descending order of size. Next to the collection, leaning against the fireplace, is a child's spelling card with a drawing of a beach ball and the letters "B_ll" on it. Not satisfied with any clever stone left unturned, Wilson says, "If we'd managed to put a light below the tray, it would *really* be amazing, but we haven't figured out how to do that, yet. It's fun for me to come up with an idea like that, and then actually do it."

Though the couple has added their design sensibility to every nook and cranny of the house, the area that need-

HOUSING COLLECTIONS IN A NOT-SO-BIG HOUSE

"WE'RE NOT REALLY COLLECTORS, BUT ANN AND I HAVE collections," says Mark Lawton of how he and his wife, Ann Wilson, tend to accumulate groups of things without really trying. Their "accidental" collections include: high-design hot water bottles, antique bug sprayers, old buttons and button cards, vintage bobby pins on their original cards, old fashioned shaving brushes, antique cameras and tins of personal hygiene products.

Moving 2,200 square feet of treasures into a 1,300-square-foot home required ingenuity in terms of how to showcase them. "We had more collections than we had space," says Wilson. For Wilson and Lawton, necessity became the mother of creativity and whimsy.

Here's how they dreamed up a couple of their most novel display ideas:

The dining room table.

"We had our glass-topped dining table in San Francisco, but we didn't implement the idea to display a collection under its glass until we got here," says Wilson.

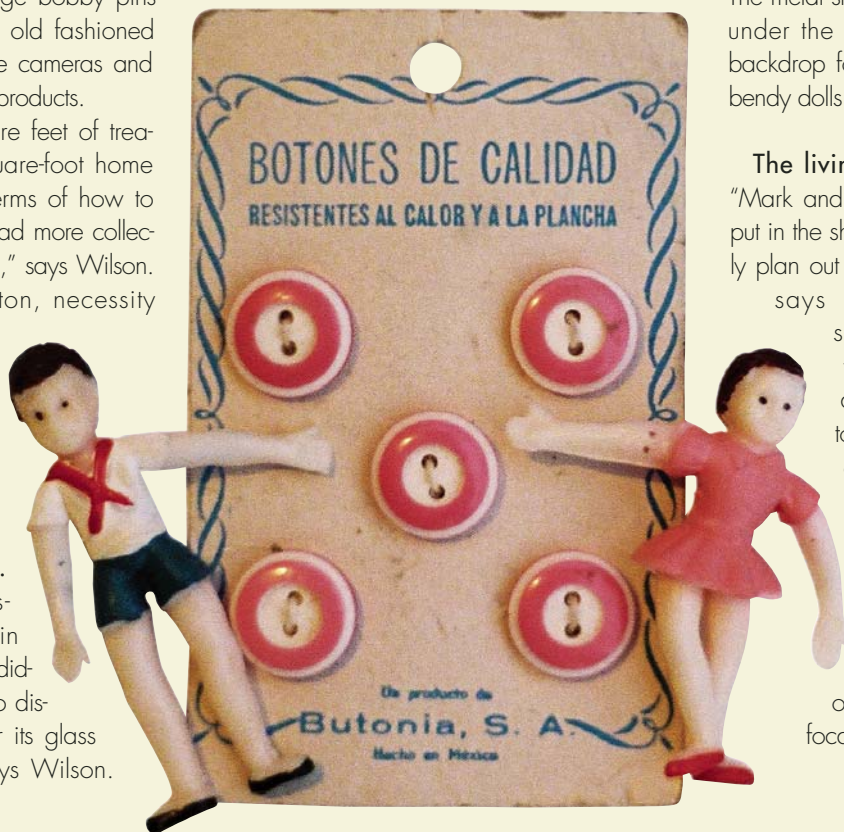
"It came about because we had more stuff than we knew where to put it. So we got the same perforated stainless steel that we used as an inset in the kitchen pantry doors and we had the H. Hirschberger Co. cut a piece for the table. Then we had holes made in the table and suspended the sheet of stainless steel."

The metal shelf now "floats" 2 inches under the glass and serves as a backdrop for Wilson's collection of bobby dolls and old button cards.

The living room bookshelves.

"Mark and I knew we had stuff to put in the shelves, but we didn't really plan out what would go where," says Wilson. "The upper shelves were here, but they had tacky glass doors on them, so we took them off and had a contractor build the lower two shelves. The decision to use the bookshelves to house the bug sprayer collection happened organically. Now the rows of bug sprayers are a focal point of the house."

—J.B.R.





"I got the sterilizer at Urban Ore in Berkeley back when you could still buy things there cheap; I got it for \$75," says Wilson of the metal cabinet that was once used to make dental equipment germfree. "It was so dirty you couldn't even tell what it was let alone see how cool the glass shelves were. Mark rewired it." The dining room table features a perforated steel shelf beneath its glass top on which Wilson displays bendable toy figures and vintage button cards (opposite page).



ed the most attention was the kitchen. "It was painted pink and had pink floral wallpaper above the cabinets," says Wilson. The cabinets, made of 1/4-inch plywood, were also painted pink.

They took out the wall between the kitchen and the dining room, eliminating a bank of upper cabinets (*below, left*), and replaced the wall with a half-wall that lets dinner guests see into the cookspace. "We did the opening to have light come into the kitchen," says Lawton. To further increase the level of natural light in the space, the couple upgraded the window above the kitchen sink and added skylight."

The kitchen became even more spacious after Wilson removed a narrow hallway that led to the back door (*below*). "When you walked in the back door, there was a narrow hall that closed off the kitchen," says Wilson. "The hallway had five doors off of it—two doors *here*, one door *here*, a door *here* and a door *here*, too." Wilson designed a pantry with custom wood and perforated metal panels where the doorway to the bathroom used to be. ("The bathroom is still *there*," she says, "you just enter it on the other side of the house.")

"We'd never lived through a remodel before, and we didn't know what it would be like," says Lawton. "We lived with a friend for the first three months, the three of us in a tiny, little hovel—that



Making the wall between the kitchen and dining room (*left*) a half-wall and removing the wall that created a hallway that led to the back door (*above*) opened up the kitchen (*above left*).

WHERE'D THEY GET that?



the red light.

cisco salvage store; Portland Powder

ler coating.

hung in a gym," says Wil-

der-coated red, which

amazing—and it's

is done for about

100. They put all your stuff in the same batch oven, so you can powder coat more than one object. Watch, now that you've seen it, you'll see this same light in a lot of places."

... the vintage adding machine.

From an O'Gallerie auction (Portland, 503-238-0202 or go to ogallerie.com): "I like its beveled glass, its numbers and its colors," says Wilson.

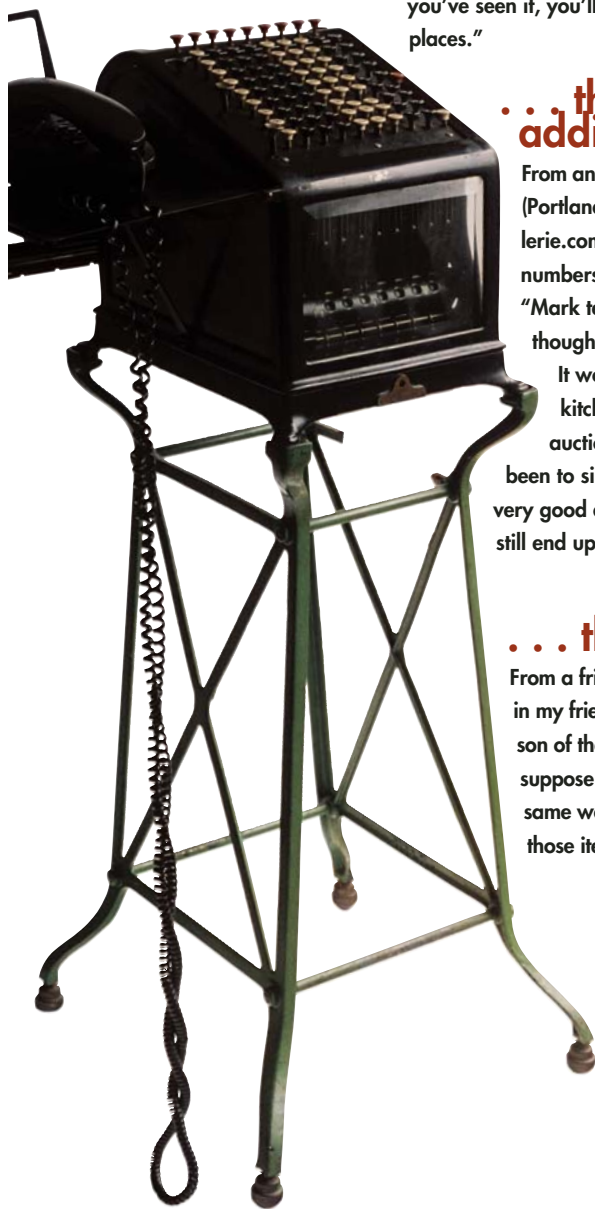
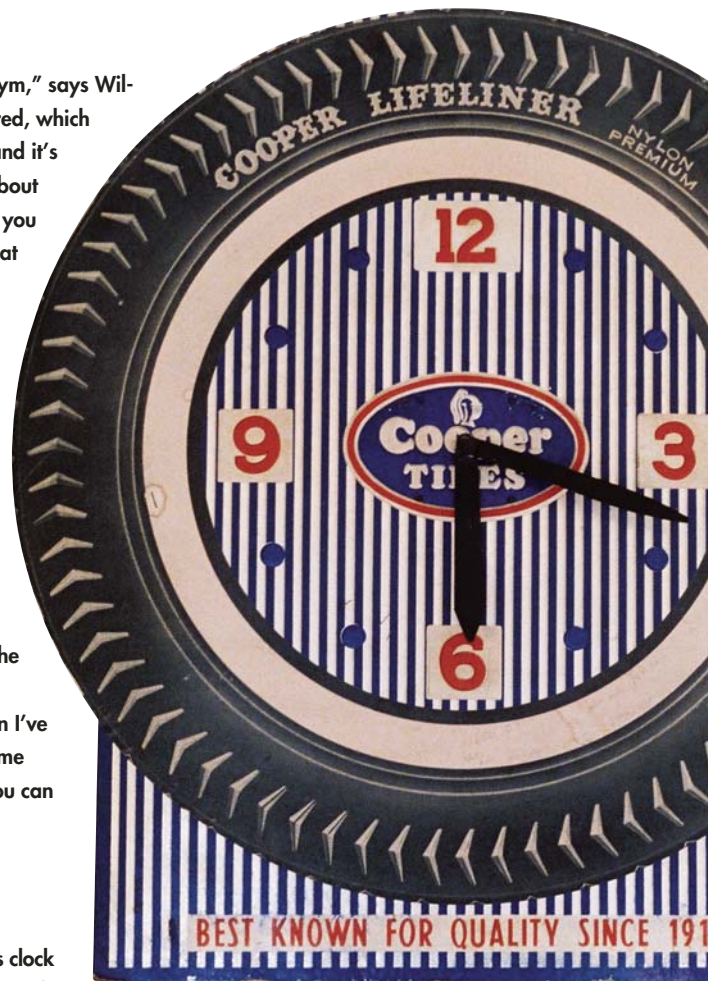
"Mark teaches math and science and I thought, *Oh, this will be great for Mark!*"

It works well as a telephone stand in the kitchen. The O'Gallerie

auction I found it at was the one auction I've been to since I moved here. Portland has some very good auctions and estate sales where you can still end up with some good finds."

... the wall clock.

From a friend. "Years ago, I came across this clock in my friend's garage in San Francisco," says Wilson of the Cooper Lifeline "tire" that keeps time in the living room. "I suppose it was on its way to the dumpster. I find the clock funny in the same way that I enjoy the button cards and the bobby pin cards. All of those items have panache."



“I think bobby pin cards from the ’40s and ’50s are really fun,” says Wilson. “I like how every word on this Gay Brand card is emphasized, as if women couldn’t think for themselves.”

was pretty hard. At some point we moved in over here but the kitchen wasn’t ready. I thought, *Okay, we’ll just move in, and in two more weeks the kitchen will be done.* It turned out it was another six weeks before the kitchen and bathroom were even close to being ready. I remember taking baths with all the walls exposed. I’d get out of the tub and step on a dirty floor.”

As for how they prepared their meals without the use of a kitchen, Lawton’s technique was simple: “I made a point of getting home late,” he says.

Because of Wilson’s design background and experience as an architectural intern, the two felt comfortable overseeing the project without the help of an architect or a general contractor. “I did the drawings and got the permits for the walls that were taken out,” says Wilson. “We were kind of general laborers, the gophers. We didn’t do any of the real work ourselves though.” New SlateScape countertops, Ikea cabinets and TK flooring complete the remodel.

Besides the kitchen, the work Wilson and Lawton did on the house was aesthetic. They ripped out linoleum, pulled up carpet and repainted walls. “There was a *lot* of pink in the house,” says Wilson, who picked out the new, interior wall colors. “I wanted to live with sub-

dued colors; they have a calming effect.” TO LOOK AROUND AT ALL THE gems Wilson and Lawton have surrounded themselves with, you’d think they spend their free time collecting things, but they swear it isn’t so. “We never really go out looking for stuff,” says Lawton. “I found these two knobs once and they were weird and quirky and cool, so I bought them. It just sort of happens that way.”

To prove her point, Wilson gestures toward the two Naugahyde chairs in the dining room that look as if they could’ve been taken from a retro museum collection. “These were out on the street in San Francisco,” she says. “They were just sitting there and I drove past them and thought, *Oh, those are cool! I should come back later and get them.* And then I thought, *Come back later and get them? I should just put them in the car now!*”

Wilson and Lawton note that the charming red chair in the guest room was also found on the street. The sterilizer in the kitchen? They picked it up at Urban Ore., a Berkeley, Calif., salvager (think Portland’s Rebuilding Center). The library card catalog in the foyer where Wilson keeps, among collections, her vintage bobby pin cards? “One summer Mark was at St. Johns College in

Santa Fe working on his master’s degree when he saw that,” says Wilson. “He was living in the dorm and he passed it by and said, ‘Are you selling that?’”

“I think bobby pin cards from the ’40s and ’50s are really fun,” says Wilson, whose stash includes brands named Curves, Flash! and Gay. “And then it became another ‘accidental’ collection. Now I have about 50 of them. I’m attracted to all of them as a group and then individually. I like their typography and how they show women. Some of them are all about glamour. I like how every word on this GAY brand card is emphasized, as if women couldn’t think for themselves. Once I started finding them, I just wanted to find *more* of them.”

Though Wilson and Lawton downsized by 1,000 square feet, they don’t regret the move. “Our old house was huge, but it was 25 feet wide and 90 feet long; this house has a layout that’s more comfortable for family life,” says Lawton, who credits Wilson for shaping his sense of design during their 19 years together. “I didn’t have any taste when I was younger, but living with Ann has developed my eye. Ann’s the brains of the operation. She usually comes up with ideas I like. The only snafu is when I have an idea on my own. If I choose from a menu of Ann’s ideas, we’re in good shape.” □

meet the professionals

TK

THE HOUSE PAINTER:

Mark and Ann Emerick, principals, Emerick Architecture, P.C., Portland
Years in business: 11
Years on their own firm: 6
Biggest challenge: “To add a second level to the 1953 house without making it look from the inside like it was a giant pop-up addition,” says Brian.

Delighted that: “We saved the old red oak that the house was originally built to wrap around,” says Brian. “The tree really benefits the house and adds to the treehouse-feeling Lee and Guido get

THE CARPENTER:

Sam Hammerman, president, Hammer and Hand Inc., Portland
Co-owner with David Thomas
Years in business: 42
Years in biz together: 10
Biggest triumph: 2003-
Contact: 503-232- or hammerandhand.com.

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