

SAN DIEGO HOME/GARDEN

LIFESTYLES®



STARS

of San Diego

WWW.SDHG.NET \$4.95
0 1>



7 25274 65895 4
JANUARY 2010

We Salute 10 Master Artists,
Craftsmen and Designers



GARY PAYNE

2010

ROBERT WRIGHT

interior designer

BY WAYNE CARLSON

Opposite: Robert Wright showed how period and modern details work in harmony in this historic La Jolla house he renovated.

Below: The den of an urban condominium Wright designed. Photograph by Brady Architectural Photography.

ASK ROBERT WRIGHT FOR HIS FAVORITE INTERIOR design projects and his answer reveals not only his views on good design but also something about what he values in life.

In naming two of his three favorite projects, he emphasized the close relationships he formed with the clients as much or more than the projects themselves — though each one is superb. For the third favorite, he chose a 1999 Interiors of the Year Grand Prize award that he won from this magazine.

“That,” he says, “was a major confirmation of my work as a residential designer. I think people saw me in a different light after that.”

Wright, a fellow in the San Diego Chapter of the American Society of Interior Designers, is well known for his talents as an elite designer, first in commercial projects, then residential. But he’s also a top-notch leader and spokesman for his industry as well as a frequent volunteer for community projects. In 2006 he served as president of the American Society of Interior Designers national organization and has been named this year’s president of the board of directors of the national Council for Interior Design Accreditation. He’s also an advocate of

aging-in-place design, eco-friendly design strategy and educational opportunities for interior designers.

A native of Houston, Wright graduated with an interior design degree from what’s now Texas State University in San Marcos and almost immediately joined a top commercial design firm in Houston.

“I started my career in the late ’70s when the oil industry was booming in Texas,” he says. “At that time, Texas was producing some of the best commercial design of the late 20th century.”

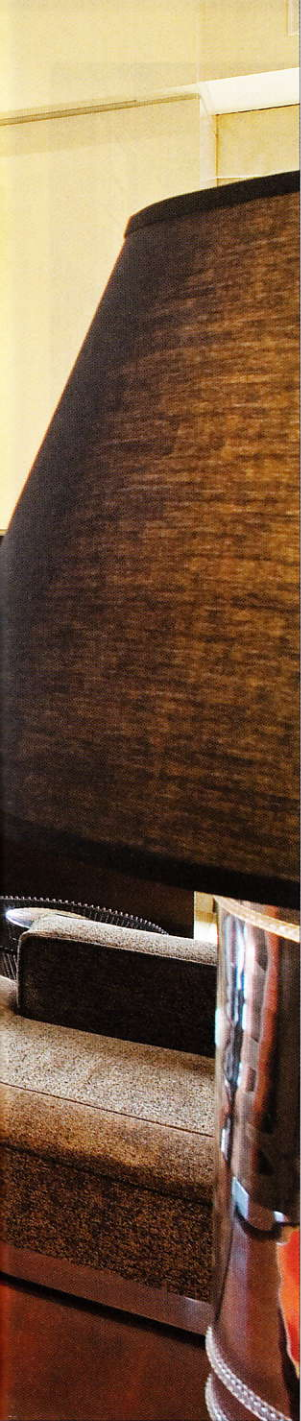
It was a period when noted architect Philip Johnson was leaving his International style mark throughout Texas with landmark high-rise buildings that later were emulated in cities throughout the nation.

“Houston was an invigorating place to be,” Wright says, “and Philip Johnson was a major inspiration to me.”

Johnson’s simple and unadorned style







Opposite: The dining room (lower left) and living room (top) of a Boston condo Wright designed. Bottom center and right: Wright's award-winning redesign of a master bathroom in a Henry Hester house in La Jolla. Images by Brady Architectural Photography.

Above and left: Wright received more plaudits for his redesign of the interiors of this historic Spanish-style home in La Jolla. Photography by John Durant.





was distinguished by the straightforward use of modern materials such as glass and steel, and the emphasis on function and structure over ornamental decoration — though the architect did, Wright points out, “some playful things on some of his buildings.”

Wright’s interior design style is not unlike Johnson’s architecture: classical and functional, simple and elegant and not overly ornamented.

“Some years ago I was part of an ASID Remodel Tour and a rather reserved, tastefully dressed lady came up to me and said, ‘I have followed your work for quite some time and there’s something about you that I like.’ And I said, ‘What would that be?’ And she said, ‘You know when to quit.’”

Architect Norm Applebaum (see page 32) punctuates the point by saying Wright “never overdoes anything.”

“In the beginning of the ‘80s, when, unbeknownst to me, the Texas economy was crashing, I decided to do a little research in Denver, which was in its heyday of its expansion,” Wright says. “I was, in effect, ‘following the oil,’ and was offered a job very quickly. His new employer was the nationally known commercial design house Neville Lewis Associates, Inc.

Six years later, Wright was hired away from Denver by Larry Herr’s Parron Hall Office Interiors in Kearny Mesa as design director. “I consider Larry one of my design mentors,” Wright says.

Wright says he got a lot of satisfaction from the renovation of a faded 1930s Spanish revival La Jolla resi-

Opposite: Attention to detail is apparent everywhere in these images of a Bonsall residence, including the elegant coffered ceilings, clerestory windows, beautiful arches, decorative tile and ornamental wrought-iron railing and sconces. Images by Brady Architectural Photography.

This page: Stair tiles and wrought-iron rail are original to this La Jolla house; walnut chair is a 17th-century antique from Spain. Photograph by John Durant.

dence by sainted architect Richard Requa. A series of ill-advised remodels had left the onetime beauty in shambles. “It was a very complex, challenging project,” Wright says.

Teaming with Applebaum, Wright showed how a historic home can be renovated with a mix of period and modern furnishings and accessories while preserving historic features. He replaced track lighting with decorative wall sconces, reconfigured kitchen and bath layouts and restored fireplaces, tiles and window treatments. The project won one of the designer’s many Design Excellence Awards.

Asked about issues of importance to his industry, Wright says: “The younger generation of interior designers is demanding to be taught about sustainability issues. Design students are keeping their teachers on their toes, because they want to weave sustainability into their practices.

“Our clients also are asking more and more questions about the products we use: Where they come from; are they



good for the earth; are they good for us. They want — even demand — that eco-friendly products be used in their homes.

“I may be an optimist, but I think that in five to 10 years, the suppliers of interior design materials will make sure all their products are friendly to the earth.”

Where to find it, page 127

Highlights

EDUCATION:

- ★ Interior design degree, Texas State University, San Marcos

NOTEWORTHY

- ★ National president, American Society of Interior Designers, 2005-06
- ★ 2010 chair, Board of Directors, Council for Interior Designers Accreditation (CIDA)
- ★ Restoration of a Henry Hester-designed modern home in La Jolla
- ★ Remodels of Sea Cliff, a historic residence in La Jolla, and Santa Barbara’s historic Neal Hotel, which now serves as the Ronald Reagan Ranch Gallery & Visitors Centers.

HONORS

- ★ Six first-place ASID Design Excellence Awards
- ★ Grand prize, *San Diego Home/Garden Lifestyles* 1999 Interiors of the Year
- ★ 2007 Homes of the Year award and 2008 Baths of the Year award from SDH/GL
- ★ Winner, ASID Ethel M. Siegelman Memorial Award for most outstanding San Diego Chapter member.