

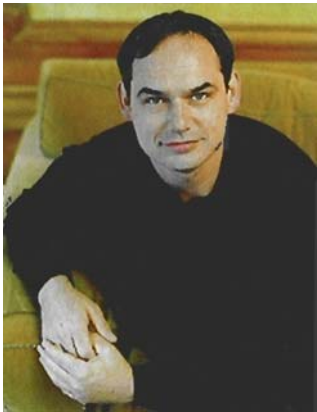


The Swede life

Designer Arthur McLaughlin proves that Contemporary mixes well with comfort.

By Sarah Robert

In a neighborhood famous for its elaborate Victorian style, one Swedish couple was on a mission to transform their Russian Hill condo into a haven of Scandinavian simplicity. They recruited interior designer Arthur McLaughlin, of Arthur McLaughlin & Associates, to combine their love of minimalism with their need for a multifunctional great room. “Function is paramount,” McLaughlin says. “I start the design process with an extensive study of how the clients will use the space, and my ‘style’ really consists of creating an environment that reflects their needs and tastes.”



To get a solid idea of just what he was up against, McLaughlin first met with the couple to determine their desires, and then took a close look at the structure of the 2,000 square foot, three bedroom condo, located in a mid-century high rise. He knew one thing instantly—the “traditional, dark and heavy” layout had to go. He opened things up by turning the enclosed foyer, staircase, living room, dining room and kitchen into one continuous space.

“I was fortunate in that I had carte blanche from visionary clients,” Says the designer. “They allowed me to reconfigure the space, Creating an entirely new floor plan. It’s easier to express a Complete vision when I can also design the interior architecture, Rather then placing furniture in an existing envelope.”

Having opened up the living and dining areas, McLaughlin set out to draw light into the home. When asked if his clients had imported any design preferences from Sweden other than their love for simplicity, McLaughlin says without hesitation: “Light! As I find with many of my northern European clients, a flood of natural light is critically important to them.” The goal was the expand and lengthen sightlines of the room’s spectacular views, which include Alcatraz and the Transamerica Pyramid. Although the windows in the living space are relatively small—and there are no windows at all in the dining area—McLaughlin maximized the light by selecting low-profile furniture and pieces with reflective and translucent surfaces. “To further augment light,” he says, “I kept window treatments to a minimum and used sheer fabrics.”



Soft Focus: The media area features Arne Jacobsen's Egg Chair, while apple green Romero Chairs by Brueton fill the dining space.

With the renovation complete and the ambiance set, McLaughlin turned his attention to decorating. He crated an artsy feel with brilliant colors set against a canvas of neutral-toned walls and floors. "The color scheme in this home was taken from the client's favorite painting," says McLaughlin, "an untitled piece by Marie-Louise Ullmark, a Swedish artist living in Marin." He pulled the blues, greens and pinks directly from the painting. "We then retreated, and kept the walls and floors neutral to unify the space."

In the living area, an intense fuchsia lounge chair and ottoman instantly draw the eye, while across the room, a fluffy angora throw echoes the color. Neutral shades are used to balance the fuchsia: The skeletal, modern chair sits upon a cream-colored loop rug, and the throw is draped over a chalk-white suede couch. "This contrast allows the colors to pop," says McLaughlin.



Standout: Erik Jorgensen lounge chair dominates this space.



Breakfast area looks out on the bay.

For the dining area, McLaughlin appropriately chose the painting's most appetizing color: fresh green apple. He then paired this with unique silver and glass pieces to create a neutral counterpoint. The room's centerpiece, an eccentric but elegant retro-check table, makes the most of the small space. It's sleek glass surface lets in light, and the chairs' cool metal frames and vibrant green upholstery are both comfortable and stylish. An antique crystal chandelier hangs above echoing the table's translucent surface and reflecting the sparkling light streaming in from the living room windows.

In addition to color, McLaughlin carefully selected the fabrics and textures for the space. "I wanted to create tension between the clean-lined wood, glass and stainless-steel architecture and luxury, soft fabrics," he says. The angora throw and suede couch offset sleek wood floors and glass windows, while the curvy lounge chair softens sharp lines.

The dining space has to serve multiple functions, says McLaughlin. "This couple frequently entertains business associates, friends, and family. They need a dining room that could accommodate a large cocktail party for 50 as easily as an intimate dinner for two." To achieve this, the designer focused on versatile pieces. He crated a flexible seating plan in the living area by using a sectional that could be made smaller or larger then coordinating chairs. The room's open floor plan and minimal furniture helped eliminate traffic flow issues.

"The color, scale and finishes make the room welcoming despite it's minimalism." says McLaughlin. "I feel like we've created a magical space for their fabled dinner parties."

