

# SINGULAR STYLE

Make an impact with a monochromatic color palette.



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"I FELT STRONGLY ABOUT KEEPING IT HISTORICALLY ACCURATE, BUT AESTHETICS CAME INTO PLAY. [THE HOMEOWNER] IS A FAN OF MIDCENTURY-MODERN STYLE, SO WE HAD TO BRING IT INTO THE CRAFTSMAN. IT WAS A BIT OF A CHALLENGE, BUT WE MADE IT WORK."



**Warm Welcome.** The plants on either side of the door are structured, but not overly so, for a more casual look. Brenner chose the concrete planters, but relied on the nursery to select the plants. The designer stayed with the warmth of wood for the front door. The exterior was changed from a pale green to a very dark gray, which looks more sophisticated and grounded.

HOW DO YOU RESPECT THE PERIOD style of your historic home while adding your favorite modern design elements to it? As this project illustrates, there are creative ways you can honor history and just reinvent it a bit.

Matthew C. Brenner of Matthew Craig Interiors was faced with the challenge of incorporating midcentury-modern furnishings into a 1920s Craftsman bungalow. It turned out to be a dream project not only for the homeowner but for the interior designer as well.

Brenner knew he and the owner would work very well together when he spotted an unexpected accessory during his tour of her home. "When I saw the light fixture in the dining room, it clued me into her personality;

"HOW CAN A DESIGNER TAKE A CRAFTSMAN HOME AND PUT MIDCENTURY-MODERN FURNITURE IN IT? I RESPECTED THE ARCHITECTURE; I DIDN'T KNOCK DOWN WALLS."

I knew that she would be open to nontraditional ideas," Brenner explains. The fixture had a round, midcentury-modern aesthetic that was in line with what the designer envisioned for the bungalow, despite its Craftsman architecture.

"I felt strongly about keeping it historically accurate, but aesthetics came into play. [The homeowner] is a fan of midcentury-modern style, so we had to bring it into the Craftsman. It was a bit of a challenge, but we made it work."

**Conversation Pieces.** The family likes to entertain, so Brenner designed areas where guests could sit and chat. The front room, pictured here, leads to the dining room. Large mirrors break up the wallpaper pattern. Brenner loves going to frame shops to design his own mirrors for clients. A clear light fixture above the Saarinen "Tulip" table and a transparent "Ghost" chair add a feeling of lightness to the small room.





**Piano Keys.** The focal point of the music room/living room is the piano, which Brenner painted using auto paint, taking it from a natural oak color to a blend of gray, tan and cream.

**Flea-Market Finds.** Brenner picked up some inexpensive frames at a flea market and found some playful, fun images for them. To hang them at the proper height, he cuts up plastic bags, measures them to the frames and hangs them on the wall. The family members are avid readers, so he added books in the cabinet, placing them on their sides for a more relaxed look.



## EXTERIOR ESSENTIALS

When Brenner arrived at the Seattle, Washington, bungalow, the façade was painted a pale green, and the homeowner was open to a new color. Brenner researched historic palettes and transferred the colors to a modern, contemporary design. “The Craftsman palette comes from the earth, so I picked

a very dark gray, earthy color. It set the tone for the rest of the house,” he says.

In fact, gray became the predominant color throughout the interior, from the wallpaper to the area rugs to the furnishings. Even the living room’s fireplace received a wash of light gray in a color Brenner calls “graige” (a mix of gray and beige).

## CREATIVE COLOR

What had been considered a design challenge in the beginning became an asset in the end. "The color palette helped us. We kept it monochromatic, so everything fit well together," Brenner says. "One of my favorite parts of the living room/music room is the painted woodwork. I love using a different color on woodwork. It's like adding a punctuation mark to a room. I painted it dark gray (Benjamin Moore's Iron Mountain)."

The designer's most unexpected and creative use of the monochromatic color was his decision to paint the family's piano. With three kids taking piano lessons, the owner wanted to keep the piano in the living room, but the designer was against having it there because its natural oak color didn't fit in with the rest of the room, so he convinced the owner to move it down to the basement. But after some time passed, the owner wanted the piano moved back upstairs because the family also uses it for entertaining.

"I said, 'Ok, but we have to paint it.' I researched how to paint a piano; I called a piano store to find out how to paint one," Brenner says. "When I asked about what kind of paint to use, they told me auto paint. Sherwin-Williams makes the auto paint, which is not sold in stores. I stuck with a monochromatic color that was closest to the wallpaper in the room, a blend of gray, tan and cream. It was a \$6,000 job, but it was worth it."



## GARDEN INSPIRED

A traditional theme found in Craftsman homes is the concept of bringing nature indoors. Brenner used nature as his muse by adding accent pieces such as a Saarinen "Tulip" table, a Hans Wegner chair in a shell design and gray floral draperies in the master bedroom. Planters filled with greenery bring the garden ambience to life.

Brenner looks back at the redesign with pride. "I think it achieves what the Craftsman builders had intended: the aesthetics of Craftsman design with a modern edge," he says. **CB**

**One-Armed Sofa.** Brenner designed the sofa and had it built by a furniture maker. He wanted only one arm because it is next to the front door, and he thought an arm on that side would look too closed off. The powder-blue and yellow pillows add contrast.

**Wonders of Wallpaper.** The dining room had been painted in pastel colors, but patterned wallpaper brings the room to life.



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**Seeing the Light.** When the designer saw the contemporary light fixture in the dining room, it clued him in to the homeowner's personality, and he felt free to suggest different styles for the home. He added wallpaper across the top of the doorframe and had the felted wool rug custom-made with an ombré design.

**Master of the House.** Brenner let the homeowner make the design decisions in the master bedroom. The furnishings and accessories were her choices, but they fit well with the rest of the rooms. The draperies are similar to the floral wallpaper in the dining room.



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## LESS IS MORE

Interior designer Matthew C. Brenner shares his tips for achieving a monochromatic, midcentury-modern style in your home.

Do your research. Study the historic styles and colors of the architectural period. People may wonder how a designer could take a Craftsman home and put midcentury-modern furniture in it. I respected the architecture; I didn't knock down walls. The bones dictate the style. Popular décor elements of the midcentury-modern period included structured furniture and tufted upholstery.

Reinterpret period colors. Instead of avocado green, apply today's colors to it. Don't be so literal and rigid with what the original color was.

Master the monochromatic. There are many ways to add interest to a single-color palette. We mixed several patterns within the gray monochromatic palette. Texture was important as well; everything has a different texture. My trick is to lay the wallpaper and paint chips I'm considering for a room on the floor to see if it all works together.

**Modern Craftsman.** This collage illustrates many ways you can add modern touches to an older home, in this case a 1920s Craftsman style. From the bold patterns of the area rugs and wallpaper to the colorful accessories on the kitchen counter and planters, you can update your home while being respectful of its history.

**Monochromatic Majesty.** The front porch is a vision of one-color perfection. However, Brenner used his signature style of painting the trim around the windows a contrasting color for a greater impact.



For more information, visit [matthewcraiginteriors.com](http://matthewcraiginteriors.com).



**Corner Table.** Brenner used a corner spot on the front porch for another opportunity to have a seating area for guests. With its gorgeous view of the surrounding foliage, it may be the best seat in the house.