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Modern Danish Furniture Finds a Home in This Victorian-style Rowhouse in Washington D. C.

Old-world details and modern Scandi flourishes sit on the same plane in this home, redesigned by Lauren Wegel and Kate Ballou

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Photography by Jennifer Hughes

By the time Josh Soven and Renata Hesse completed the renovation of their Washington D. C. rowhouse with architect Lauren Wegel, they were ready to blow off the dust, hang up their boots and settle in. But alas, it wasn't long before they realised that such an undertaking wasn't in their stars—at least, not right away. After all, their new home still lacked a certain *je ne sais quoi*. Recognising that they'd need a helping hand with the interiors, they reached back out to Wegel, who, with a little help from her network, put them through to Kate Ballou—founder and principal of D. C.-based Hendrick Interiors—known for her expertise in sourcing classic furniture from Danish masters such as Hans Wegner, Finn Juhl, Poul Kjarholm and Arne Jacobsen.

"We had met Kate on a couple of occasions, through her association with Annette Rachlin of *Furniture from Scandinavia*, the local resource for exclusive Danish furniture, while looking for pieces at the beginning of the design process," recalls Hesse, adding that for her and Soven, the main challenge lay in furnishing the reading room and the living and dining areas. "Focusing on art and other decorative elements that could add personality and a bit of colour were key points for us." Another priority, which they trusted Ballou would honour, was furnishing the home in a way that paid homage to both the original Victorian elements and the modern additions.

For Ballou, the point of departure was Soven and Hesse's existing furniture collection, which included charming pieces by Kagan, McCobb, Saarinen and Eames. "We were looking for designs that were light and clean, and modern, but didn't clash with the home's Victorian crown moulding, ceiling medallions and fireplaces," avers Soven, adding that he and Hesse spent a lot of time researching mid-century furniture, and somewhere along the way, had discovered a passion for collecting and investing in pieces.

In addition to growing their burgeoning modern Danish furniture collection, the couple—who share two teenagers and a dog—was hoping to bring in some colour by way of accents and art, without having everything look too "matchy-matchy". "We both love mid-century modern

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architecture and design, so you see a lot of that influence in what we ended up choosing. We also spent a lot of time independent of Kate finding things that we liked and sending them to each other for views," notes Hesse.

The home whispers of a past life—but only to those who stop to look and listen long enough. In the foyer, a vintage glass pendant fixture sets the tone for the home, while original pine flooring, refinished and bleached with a special formula by Wegel (and perfected with Soven and Hesse's contractor), brings an old-world sheen. In the living room, an original fireplace mantel warms the room, literally and figuratively. Likewise, the walls all around, finished in plaster and painted white, and the sky-high ceilings, truly bring to life the dramatic proportions of the Victorian architectural details.

By the same token, the furnishings represent an impressive collection of mid-century master furniture designers. A gorgeous Oushak rug anchors the living room, while a Ring Crown chandelier lends an understated elegance. The showstopper, per Ballou, however, is the Kagan sofa, which masquerades as an objet d'art.

"I think my favorite part of our home is the room that we end up using the least," laughs Hesse, referencing the office-turned-reading room. "I love how all the pieces come together. It's comfortable and inviting." That said, the family spends the most time in the kitchen, which was relocated from the basement to the first floor by Wegel. Of course, its popularity is for good reason. With clean-lined custom cabinetry and muted forms, the shell lets the home's original architecture take the spotlight.

Something that never fails to bring a smile to the couple's faces, they reveal, is the Saarinen dining table (which is also indestructible). Other pieces that top the order of favourites include the Jeanneret chair in the living room, the Charlotte Perriand stools, and the light fixtures on the first floor. "We also love the art that Kate helped us acquire. It is modern but also warm and playful. We particularly love the photograph over the fireplace in the dining room," explains Hesse.

Speaking of dining rooms, this particular one was originally used as a den, but was converted into its present form due to its proximity to the kitchen. In the same vein, Wegel opened up the wall to the hall and added a second arched doorway to mimic the arched doorway in the entry hall.

Yet, these structural changes hardly hold a candle to the struggles the couple went through to perfect the dining room light fixture. "We went through a lot of tries, but eventually came back to the same fixture that we had originally selected from Apparatus, just in a smaller size and different finish. We considered many alternate options and even purchased and installed another fixture before deciding that our first choice was probably the best one," recounts Soven.

The primary bedroom, situated on the top floor, feels like an independent haven. Still, there are subtle nods to the rest of the home: recently installed wooden flooring (to replace the wall-to-wall carpeting) holds a mirror to the original pine floors. And custom dressers and nightstands provide ample storage without feeling overbearing.

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For Ballou, the process of handpicking each piece with Soven and Hesse was a rare and happy departure from the norm. "We took our time with each piece until it felt right and always reviewed finish samples in the space before landing on our selections," she explains, adding that the process was somewhat protracted in parts, thanks to busy schedules and the mandates of the pandemic.

The home today comes very close to Soven and Hesse's once-upon-a-time vision. "The house is much more functional now, yet maintains its period feel. We love being home!" Hesse signs off.