

# Midcentury Renewal

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**An interior designer in Portland updates a 1950s home by a celebrated local architect.**

Interior designer Jessica Helgerson remade a Portland abode (opposite) with a crisp paint palette: Benjamin Moore's Wrought Iron for the cladding and Venetian Gold for the front door. Landscape design is by Lillyvilla Gardens. In true

mid-century fashion, a George Nelson Bubble Lamp is paired with an Eames Lounge by Charles and Ray Eames in a corner of the living room. The glass walls and mitered corner are original features of architect Saul Zaik's 1956 design.



PROJECT  
Milford Residence  
ARCHITECT  
Zaik Associates  
DESIGNER  
Jessica Helgerson  
Interior Design  
LOCATION  
Portland, Oregon



As International Style modernism flourished in the mid-20th century, architects in the Pacific Northwest developed a regional version, fusing the glassy transparency of Mies van der Rohe and Richard Neutra with a reverence for natural wood and pitched roofs. But by the time Ty and Kelly Milford found one such gem, a succession of past alterations had marred its original design. Acclaimed local architect Saul Zaik had built the wood-clad Feldman House in Southwest Portland in 1956, with a dramatically cantilevered, low-pitched gable roof and floor-to-ceiling glass. So why was there a post right in the middle of the family room? Why were the ceilings taller in the bathroom than in the master bedroom?

“We wanted to put back the part of Saul’s design that had been remodeled out of the house,” recalls Ty Milford, a photographer and midcentury-design enthusiast with a collection of George Nelson clocks in his bedroom and two vintage Porsches parked outside. “We didn’t want to go back exactly to the original kitchen and bathrooms,” he says, but he notes that subsequent renovations had been on a budget—and >

The living room (above) sports a panoply of wood: Douglas fir for the ceiling, hemlock for the walls, and stained oak for the floor. The sofa is the Neo model by Bensen and the rug is vintage. A vintage Molded Plywood Lounge Chair (LCW) by Charles and Ray Eames for Herman Miller sits in front of built-in shelving in untreated hemlock (right). For the kitchen (opposite), master bath, and kids’ bathroom, the designers chose three different hues of Savoy stacked mosaic tile from Portland-based manufacturer Ann Sacks. Tractor barstools by BassamFellows pull up to a PentelQuartz countertop. The gas cooktop, oven, and dishwasher are by Miele.





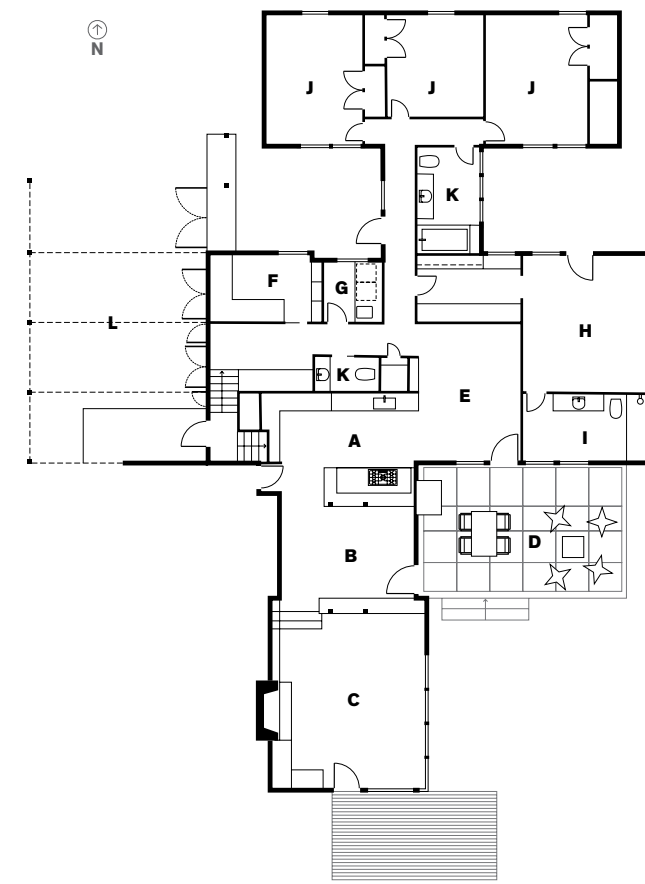
it showed. “We wanted a cohesive house where at no point did something jump out as not fitting.”

After an extensive renovation, overseen by Portland firm Jessica Helgerson Interior Design, the Milfords and their two children, Adam and Malian, ages two and six, can enjoy Zaik’s original vision again: a fusion of indoor and outdoor and cozy yet wide-open spaces, both pristine and casual. “The house had some really lovely things about it and some really problematic things,” Helgerson recalls. “But our goal was for it to look as if we hadn’t done anything, to be authentic to the era of the house. What would Saul do?”

Luckily, they could still ask him; the elder architect came to visit the house during construction to answer questions and bless the renovation. “[My generation of architects] were all World War II veterans, and we were out to change the idea of architecture,” says Zaik, who, at age 87, still practices today. “We were really just building boxes with a bunch of windows but experimenting with how you integrated indoor and outdoor spaces.” Indeed, the Milfords’ home has seven different openings to the exterior, allowing different

courtyard or patio settings for a range of outdoor activities: tables and seating for a gathering on the street-facing side, a hot tub nestled on a wood deck in back, and, off the kids’ rooms, a swing set that’s built into a load-bearing beam.

The house’s primary public space—an adjoining living and dining area—was left largely intact, with floor-to-ceiling glass walls that form a mitered corner redolent of Frank Lloyd Wright. (A scene from the 1994 Harvey Keitel movie *Imaginary Crimes* was even filmed in the house, with one of the characters making note of the glass corner.) The room sports a host of different woods: a Douglas fir ceiling, restored hemlock walls, a newly stained oak floor, and an original credenza made from Japanese sen ash. In the kitchen, the raised floors—dating to one of the ill-advised remodels and done to mitigate asbestos without removing it—had to go, as did a redundant second front door. The design team, including builder Brad Lackey, also added new birch cabinetry and created a custom screen along one side of the kitchen counter that apes the original entry’s alternating glass-and-wood facade. >



Milford Residence Floor Plan

- A Kitchen
- B Dining Room
- C Living Room
- D Patio
- E Family Room
- F Office
- G Laundry Room
- H Master Bedroom
- I Master Bathroom
- J Bedroom
- K Bathroom
- L Carport

The sofa in the family room (opposite) was designed by Helgerson with Magnifique fabric by Kravet. The 265 Wall Lamp is by Paolo Rizzatto for Flos, and the pine coffee table

is from The Good Mod, a local shop in Portland. Resident Ty Milford peruses a book by the George Nelson-inspired built-ins (below) fabricated by Big Branch Woodworking.





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**—Jessica Helgerson, designer**

Arne Jacobsen wall sconces are in the master bedroom (above), which is furnished with a Case Study bed and a Series 11 6 Drawer Console by Blu Dot. The wool carpet (opposite) is from Iberia. A Bird Chair by Harry Bertoia for Knoll and a Grasshopper Lamp by Greta Grossman round out the room.

The flooring in the master bath (below) is vein-cut Ocean Silver travertine. The custom bathroom vanity is stained birch, the polished chrome fixtures are from Hansgrohe’s Axor Uno<sup>2</sup> line, and the chair is upholstered in Checker by Alexander Girard for Maharam.

The family room had been expanded over the years, hence the wayward post in the middle; Helgerson’s plan restored a wall that had been there, shrinking the space back to its original size but making it feel expansive with a new built-in sectional sofa. This reconfigured wall created enough space to relocate the master bedroom to a quieter part of the house, away from the kids’ bedrooms, with its own small outdoor courtyard.

The back bedrooms, which during a later expansion had been constructed on the cheap with aluminum windows and low ceilings, were both reconfigured and resurfaced to be congruent with the rest of the house. A new master bathroom adds a touch of elegance, with gray travertine floors and vintage Ann Sacks–tile walls. An entry from the carport was added, along with a new mudroom that features built-in wood alcoves for each family member.

“I love the simplicity and yet complexity of the house,” says Kelly Milford, relaxing in the living room after returning from the nearby high school where she works as a counselor. “It’s not very big, but when you add all the different feels of the different spaces, it feels like a much bigger house than 2,600 square feet.” □

