

Paul Vincent Wiseman & THE WISEMAN GROUP Inner Spaces

BRIAN D. COLEMAN photographs by MATTHEW MILLMAN



with forewords by FRANK O. GEHRY
and PAUL GOLDBERGER

Foreword

I never like to force my own designs on the interior of a client's house. I want people to make it theirs, with furniture and art that is meaningful to them. That's when it is great to work with a designer like Paul Wiseman. He knows how to make interiors that are accessible and comfortable. He can work in a good range of styles, from more formal and traditional to clean and modern. He can do traditional without being soft and pandering. He can use restraint in a modern home without falling prey to nouveau minimalism. I don't want to be in a room that is highly decorative and overwhelms the senses, but I also don't want to feel like a room is so spare that I can't take my shoes off and relax.

I first met Paul in 1987, early in his career, and have always been impressed with his ability to work with architecture. A lot of interior designers don't know how to do this, but Paul has an intuitive understanding of materials, space, and form. He pays attention to site and context. As a result, his work reflects thoughtful interaction with the architecture of a building. One of the best examples of this skill is his work at the two Legoretta-designed houses in Hawaii, included in this book. The architecture of each is simple and powerful, and Paul has worked with it beautifully. The interiors are rich and colorful while retaining a light feel. The décor is in harmony with the structures and the topography of their sites.



Frank Gehry and Paul Wiseman

Though Paul and I are doing distinctly different things in the design world, we have much in common. Our fathers both thought we were dreamers and couldn't understand why we weren't pursuing "practical" careers. They just didn't understand the power of dreaming! As young men, we both moved to Paris for a year. Paul soaked in the richness of European life in one of the world's great cities. This experience is deep in his design bones.

Paul has had confidence in his own creativity and has given himself permission to think outside the box. It took tremendous courage for him to go out on his own at the age of twenty-seven. I know going out on my own unleashed me, and I sense that it has been the same for Paul. He's done well because of his natural talent and hunger for visual information—essential traits that Paul possesses beyond his book knowledge and intellect.

As adults, we both developed our crafts in the vibrancy of California living—he in San Francisco and I in Los Angeles. The ability to absorb all kinds of ideas from the art and design world around us is an important skill we share.

Paul has a strong sense of right and wrong that informs his business practices. I really appreciate this about him. His firm has a reputation for integrity and honesty. He's realistic with clients about what will be involved in a project and can account for everything—an approach that is often missing in our fields.

A design project requires someone competent and trustworthy at the helm—someone who can visualize it all and organize it in his head. You have to be able to work with and understand all the craftspeople, what they can do and what they can't do, and make it all come together. And you have to balance all this with the clients' hopes, dreams, and expectations.

I've always maintained that good clients, ones that are engaged in the process but have a high degree of trust, make for good buildings. They are the most important influence on the work. While the client talks about what he wants, you sniff the air and intuitively pick up the scent. The project magically grows from this collaborative process. It's clear from these pages that Paul has an excellent nose and has engendered the necessary trust from his clients for this kind of magic to occur.

—Frank O. Gehry
Los Angeles



Foreword

It is a commonplace that interior designers and architects do not get along, that designers think architects create impractical structures that they are then hired to fix, while architects think that designers are brought in to destroy the purity of their work. Not for nothing did Frank Lloyd Wright refer to interior designers as “inferior desecrators.” But if this is a time-honored rivalry, Paul Vincent Wiseman will have none of it. The first thing you realize when you look at his work and read how his projects came together is that he is an interior designer who wants to collaborate with architecture, not cover it up. Many of his best projects are the result of a three-way partnership between the client, an architect, and Paul himself. He realizes that his work has the potential to make architecture look better, and frequently it does. He completes works of architecture, which is very different from getting in their way.

Paul’s ability to engage architecture in dialogue comes, I think, from both deep knowledge of architecture and great enthusiasm for it—his world is the world of space as much as it is the world of fabrics and antiques. Indeed, I think it’s fair to say that he has a greater spatial awareness than almost any designer I know: he looks at rooms three-dimensionally, not as a series of walls, and he is likely to give as much thought to the placement of a tiny ceramic bowl as to an eight-foot sofa.

It is telling that certain words—“curate,” “comfortable,” and “serene” among them—come up a number of times in the text of this book. I sometimes think that Paul sees himself as a curator as much as a designer, which is surely part of the reason he is such a good designer. He doesn’t want to remake the world, just to reassemble its parts in a way that makes for a better life. He is a connoisseur who believes that the best way to honor the things he and his clients respond to is to engage them in dialogue with space, light, and other objects. You might say that his goal is to seamlessly merge a client’s life with his own visual sensibility. It is a sensibility that sees comfort and beauty not as opposed, but as reinforcing each other. In the work of some designers, elegance has a certain kind of tension about it, sending the message that perfection is stressful. In Paul Wiseman’s work, elegance is the road to serenity.

—Paul Goldberger
New York



The vision we developed for the house was of a sophisticated Arts and Crafts cottage—the Cotswolds with a William Morris flavor. In keeping with this motif, we used custom Lutyens furniture and Pewabic tile inside and out. —PVW

Cotswolds-Inspired Cottage in California

Inspiration is the basis of good design, whether it's a favorite antique, memories from childhood, or a trip abroad. Paul and his team had designed the couple's main residence, introducing them to the beauty and charm of English architecture and, in particular, British Arts and Crafts. For this home in California, it began in England's Cotswolds. They visited the Sir John Soane Museum with Paul on a trip to London and were entranced with Soane's genius; they also met Sir Edwin Lutyens's granddaughter Candia. Visits were made to several iconic homes Lutyens had designed in the Cotswolds, including the picturesque Edwardian gardens at Hestercombe House that he created with Gertrude Jekyll at the beginning of the twentieth century. Captivated by the beauty and grace of Lutyens's work, the clients acquired an antique English stone chimneypiece. Their minds were made up: they wanted a Cotswolds cottage, highlighted with the best of English Arts and Crafts design, nestled in a romantic Californian garden.

Paul and The Wiseman Group's design principals Joseph Matzo and James Hunter, working with well-known New York architect Joel Barkley of Ike Kligerman Barkley, began with the stone chimneypiece as the foundation for the home's interior. It was installed as the focal point in the living room, with a pair of handsome Biedermeier walnut bookcases lined in horsehair set on either side. A unique, nineteenth-century patinated bronze astrolabe table serves as a coffee table and ottoman in the center of the room. Handcrafted objects and eclectic charm, hallmarks



The architect, Joel Barkley of Ike Kligerman Barkley, and I were in agreement: the clients knew how to get the best from both of us. They challenged us all along the way, extracting from us our best work. —PVW



Aerie Villa in Napa

Fresh air, sunshine, and cool mountain breezes: the owners were enamored of California's climate and had found a perfect site from which to enjoy it—forty acres perched on top of a craggy mountain overlooking the Napa Valley. The view was spectacular: lush, green vineyards in the valley, blue-gray peaks of the Central Coast Range beyond, and on clear days, downtown San Francisco shimmering in the distance. Richard Beard of B.A.R. Architects planned an aerie villa only one room deep that would offer vistas from every window and terrace. He introduced Paul to the client, and, working with design principal Joseph Matzo and The Wiseman Group, the team designed elegant interiors for this rustic environment.

Natural materials throughout relate the home to its mountaintop setting: macassar ebony, oak, and mahogany woodwork, marble-tiled baths, limestone floors inside, and textured bluestone pavers on the loggias. Furnishings are kept simple yet sophisticated to emphasize the views. Each room opens to a loggia or terrace to expand the living areas outdoors.

The wife has a background in design and helped select many pieces, including a striking organic red Chihuly sculpture that is the focal point of the living room. The room is balanced with two creamy white cotton sofas arranged back to back beneath the glass sculpture, along with a pair of cream lounges trimmed





When an adjacent property became available, the homeowners purchased it to add a guest quarters and expand the gardens. The backyard was redesigned, with the original, awkwardly sited swimming pool next to the house being relocated to the far end of a gracious allée of lawn and mature pin oaks.

Inspired by the stone barns and shingled homes of New England, Shay Zak, of Zak Architecture, created a welcoming Arts and Crafts guest lodge. Interiors were kept natural, with handsome stone fireplaces, vaulted ceilings with exposed trusses, and natural Port Orford cedar woodwork throughout. Large spaces were designed for gathering and entertaining, along with a bedroom for guests and an art studio for the husband.

Furnishings are simple and comfortable, befitting a country lodge. In the living room, lounge chairs upholstered in soft fox brown are placed before the fireplace, on either side of a custom-designed walnut coffee table and ottoman. A hooked rug anchors the room. The media room is the center of the lodge: inviting sofas and club chairs are grouped for comfortable viewing in front of the large, retractable movie screen.

Meeting Paul and The Wiseman Group was the foundation, the owners believe, for them to create such a special home. It was the enthusiasm and synergy they developed while working together that focused their vision, resulting in a home that is a true reflection of themselves, restored with an appreciation of the past but looking toward the future.

The clients were able to acquire an adjoining property, where they built a pool house, clearly inspired by the design of the original historic home. —PVW



This project was extremely personal for me: the client is my childhood best friend and the property is just two miles from where I was raised. It gave me great pleasure to help create such a lovely, comfortable environment for someone dear to me, in an area that has been so integral to my personhood. —PVW

Farmhouse Abstracted

East of San Francisco and south of Sacramento, the California Delta is 1,100 square miles of meandering inland waterways and silt-rich islands formed by the confluence of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers. It is a major source of water for Central and Southern California and one of the richest farming areas in the world. Freshwater channels crisscross sunbaked fields and orchards nestled among levees built to control the high tides and seasonal flooding. Life here is slow and peaceful, much like it was over a century ago, when farms were first established to feed Gold Rush prospectors. Paul grew up here, as did his childhood friend Chiles Wilson, who stayed on to run his family's agriculture business.

When Chiles and his wife, Leslie, decided it was time to build their dream home, it was only natural that they

contact their friend Paul to help. They toured several properties in the area and fell in love with Passa Tempo, a tranquil, 1,000-acre pear orchard on an island with views of Mount Diablo and the Sacramento River. Originally a farm labor camp during the Great Depression, the only remaining structures were simple 1930s corrugated tin-roofed buildings. At Paul's suggestion, they contacted architects David Morton and his colleague Kurt Melander, now of Melander Architects, who took over when, sadly, Morton passed away midway through the project. Morton understood how to site a home properly, making sense of its setting and celebrating its environment. Inspired by the planked labor camp buildings, they designed an elegant but straightforward residence with basic white plaster walls and a generous overhanging tin roof, sited





A vintage fixture I found in Paris inspired the lights for the entry area of the home. We had three large fixtures custom made of bronze and slumped glass. They set the tone for the modernity inside. —BM

Living with Art in San Francisco

Good art is inspirational, but it's not always easy to live with: proper display, lighting, and spatial planning are important. And the art must be proportionate and integrated within the home's architecture and furnishings. The homeowners, passionate collectors, had gathered an array of works from major contemporary artists, including Richter, Polke, Murakami, Kapoor, Levine, and Stingel. Many pieces were on a large scale and needed a proper area for their display. After much searching, a historic Spanish-Mediterranean villa was found, perched high on a hill in San Francisco, with expansive views and adequate space and volume for the collection. Built in 1924, its rooms were dark and claustrophobic and their colors dated and uninviting. Paul, design principal Brenda

Mickel, and The Wiseman Group had worked with the clients on several previous residences and knew what was needed: they would work with Richard Beard of B.A.R. Architects and the clients to transform the dated villa into a modern home for entertaining. The home would have formal public rooms as well as intimate spaces for the family and would celebrate both the art and the dramatic setting.

The home's historic character was carefully preserved; all exterior changes required city planning commission approval. Set at the end of a long private drive, the villa's exterior was ornamented with handsome terra-cotta columns and decorative wrought-iron window guards that were meticulously cleaned and conserved.



Minimalist details are the most difficult. Nothing in this spectacular apartment was left to chance. —PVW



Penthouse Panache

The owner had purchased an expansive, two-story penthouse with sweeping city views and asked Paul, design principal Joseph Matzo of The Wiseman Group, and noted architect Ugo Sap to help with its redesign. The exceptional views and the client's collections were to be the apartment's focus and would determine the furnishings, most of which would be custom designed by Matzo.

Colors throughout the apartment are soft neutral hues of cream, caramel, and white. A streamlined International style creates an uncomplicated background, accented by materials used in the apartment's construction: straight-grained

rift white oak, stainless steel, stone, plaster, and glass. To avoid clutter, furnishings serve more than one function. For the living room, Matzo designed chairs with one wooden arm wide enough to accommodate a drink or book, thus avoiding the need for small side tables, as well as an L-shaped coffee table that embraces a round ottoman for additional seating. A silk-screened painting above the mantle conceals a recessed television screen.

Translucent curved glass panels, suspended from the ceiling on recessed tracks, close off the living room from the open dining room when greater intimacy is desired.



When we found the house, it was painted pink and green; but behind that masquerade, it reminded me of a yali on the Bosphorus. I told the agent, "I'm sorry, but I have to live here." —PVW



Tranquility in Marin County

Content in their San Francisco Nob Hill apartment with weekends at their wooded Mill Valley retreat, Paul and his partner, Richard Neil Snyder, were not looking for a new house. But friends urged them to see a special Craftsman villa recently placed on the market. So, one summer afternoon, they drove north across the Golden Gate Bridge to picturesque Belvedere Island, situated between Sausalito and Tiburon on San Francisco Bay. The house had been built in 1912 by Dr. Florence Nightingale Ward, a pioneering female physician and close friend of famed architect Julia Morgan (who may well have helped in its design), as a simple open-air retreat.

Perched on a steep hillside above the bay, the house was not easy to get to: one had to approach on foot down a narrow lane bordered by tall hedges, entering

the property through a secluded garden gate. As soon as he saw the home, however, Paul's heart began pounding: purple wisteria cascaded from the upper terrace, perfuming the air with its delicate scent, and sunlight dappled on the deep blue waters of the bay below. The layout of the home was open and welcoming, with light-filled rooms opening to broad loggias on the west and south sides of the house, extending the living areas outdoors. Centuries-old California live oaks shaded gardens terracing down the hillside, with the potential for secret garden rooms and vistas. With its secluded yet airy setting, the cottage exuded a sense of tranquility, something that Paul and Richard realized was missing from their lives. After just one visit, they knew this would be their home.

