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SHADOW PLAY

For a couple on Mercer Island, Washington, designer Kelly Wearstler conjures an atmosphere of dark and moody glamour, shot through with glints of gold

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Lara and Jeff Sanderson did not want to hire a decorator. Yes, the 11,000-square-foot house they'd recently bought on Mercer Island, Washington, was in dire need of total revamping. But their meetings with interior designers left the couple feeling underwhelmed. What they wanted was an artist. So they turned to Kelly Wearstler.

To the casual observer, Wearstler might appear to inhabit the white-hot center of the decorating universe—she has been hailed as the heiress apparent to Hollywood's grand Regency style, and is a virtuoso of its glitz and glamour. In reality, she's a free spirit who didn't get where she is in her career by playing it safe. She is possessed of a creative confidence that allows her to take chances based on eye and instinct alone. "I'm not an intellectual designer," says Wearstler. "I'm a very emotional designer. I listen to what my client says and then I take it to heart."

Eleven hundred miles north of Wearstler's Los Angeles studio—and just a stone's throw from earnest, rainy Seattle—the Sandersons' new abode was classic Pacific Northwest on the outside: a rambling 1946 cottage-style house clad in split-cedar siding and clinker brick. Yet the Sandersons longed to pass through its front door into a different world, equal parts Parisian jewel box, scholar's retreat, and natural wonder.

Jeff and Lara, who married four years ago, bring a broad diversity of interests to their union. Princeton- and Harvard-educated Jeff arrived at Microsoft in 1984, and stayed for 17 years; he left to become a middle-school math teacher for several years. A collector of music manuscripts, he often plays piano in his downtime. Lara, a professionally trained dancer who grew up among artists, shifted careers to politics. Two summers ago, the couple started a venture-capital fund, Sanderson Ventures, aimed at supporting small local businesses that will contribute to their communities.

The Sandersons' house is a manifestation of their combined passions—with an art-filled salon, a music room lined with pages scribbled by the likes of Beethoven and Mahler, and a warm, sprawling kitchen. The master bath is clad in onyx fantastico

FACING PAGE: Lane and Jeff Sanderson with their dogs, Penny, left, and Scooter, at their Mercer Island, Washington, home, which was designed by Kelly Wearstler.
THIS PAGE: Circa 1950 French armchairs and a custom-made Berber rug, and shelving in the library; the table lamps and globe are from JF &hen. See Resources.



A De Sede sofa and Art Deco-style chairs surround a custom-made cocktail table in the salon; the light fixture is by Jean de Merry, and the painting at far right is by Chester Arnold. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP:** A wall in the library is clad in negro marquina marble inset with brass; the rug is custom made. The staircase off the salon has a brass railing designed by Wearstler, and the wallpaper is by Porter Teleo. See Resources.





In the entry hall, the light fixture is vintage, the stone sculpture is from JF Cheri, the walls are painted in a custom color, and the floor is patterned with three different marbles, and on the ceiling is a custom made, the lamp is vintage, and the covering is by Cannon/Bullock. Wearstler designed the staircase in the library. The dining table, inspired by Jean-Michel Frank, is surrounded by Art Deco chandeliers are of Venetian glass, the ceiling is sheathed in a De Gournay wall covering, and the rug is by the Rug Company. See Respo







The island in the kitchen is brass, the cabinetry is cerused oak, and the countertops are marble; the light fixtures are custom made. **FACING PAGE:** The sitting room's wall covering is by De Gournay, the chairs are vintage, and the light fixture is 1960s; the ceiling is covered in a custom wallpaper. See Resources.

stone, which Jeff calls "the most astonishing creation of nature you could imagine. It makes it very clear that there are forces larger than oneself giving beauty in this world." The one room that, above all, seems simply to have been dreamed into existence is the double-height library. To create it, the ceiling was punched through to a small upstairs bedroom. Wearstler designed its massive partners desk and the brass-railed spiral staircase. "That staircase got so much love," says Wearstler, who worked first with a metalworker and then with "the

guy who gave it that perfect patina. It was like adding a piece of jewelry to the room."

Indeed, as much as the Sandersons wanted their house to reflect themselves, they also wanted it to bear witness to the work and passion of the people who collaborated on it, from the artists who hand-painted the wallpapers to the stonemasons who set the marble floors in the entry hall. Says Jeff, "If the people building your house are of a wonderful spirit, that spirit will continue to inhabit the house through their craftsmanship."





In the master bedroom, the table and chairs, lighting, mirrors, and bookcase are from John Seals Co. Art Deco, and the clock are from Epoque. Custom-made bedclothes and vintage lamps flank the bed. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP:** A guest bath. A chaise longue and Ben's console in the hallway outside the master bedroom. The wall is covered in a hand-painted, Ben's 'reel' wallpaper. See Resources.



The master bath walls are covered in onyx fantastico, and the flooring is marble and onyx; the sconces are vintage. **FACING PAGE:** In a guest room, the custom-made bed is upholstered in leather and dressed with linens by Kelly Wearstler for Sierra; the hand-painted wallpaper is by Porter Teleo, the vintage side tables are from JF Chen, and the light fixture is a Paris flea-market find. See Resources.

One person whose passion is evident at every turn is Wearstler. "Kelly has infinite creativity," says Lara, who describes the entry hall as "the Kelly special." "That's where she was in her power alley, doing what she does best." Asked about the first impression it makes on visitors, Jeff replies, "Shazam."

Elsewhere, Lara's earthier sensibility plays off Wearstler's exuberance. A guest bedroom is done in a neutral palette, for example, but a giant pattern of concentric rings is splashed across the walls and ceiling, inspired, says the designer, by the cross section of tree trunks. The dining room, too, represents a unique alchemy between client and decora-

tor. "I'd never done a purple dining room," says Wearstler, who created the palette at Lara's request, and found the pair of Venetian-glass chandeliers through a dealer in New York. "I love to be challenged by my clients," she adds. "There are a million combinations that get you to the perfect design solution. It's that exploration that's so nice."

For the Sandersons, the sense of discovery didn't stop once the house was complete. "Jeff and I walk around and say, 'I can't believe it's so beautiful,'" says Lara. "When something is well designed, there's harmony in it, but also something that throws you off-kilter. It stimulates your intellect." ■

