

# CS Interiors



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## Shade Worker

Aussie designer Jenny Rossignuolo imports a palette of warm tones and bold design to give an Uptown house its day in the sun.

By Lisa Cregan | Photography by Tony Soluri

Amid the labyrinth of prosaic Uptown alleys, one garage rooftop seems oblivious to the climatic realities of the Upper Midwest. It's a full-fledged outdoor room encased by plantings and appearing quite capable of floating away down Broadway beneath its cloud of triangular canvas sails. "The sails add a sense of sculpture and drama. In Australia, everybody has them," says the home's designer, Aussie native Jenny Rossignuolo, who's also the owner of the fashion-forward interior design store Urban Source.

Chicago may not get quite as many days of sunshine as Rossignuolo's native Melbourne, but the sails do double duty—blocking both the rays of the summer sun and the gazes from nearby buildings. Those

**TONE POEM**  
In the living room of this Uptown home, designer Jenny Rossignuolo paired Pierre Paulin's iconic Pumpkin seater from Ligne Roset with a blue armchair from Bo Concept and a Room & Board sofa. Architect Greg Howe used acid-edged steel for the fireplace surround to provide the room with a "strong but simple gesture."





Left: Paper-backed vinyl wallcoverings from Urban Source give the master bedroom a sense of texture while the Orange Skin bed and custom-colored Liora Manne rug provide tactile luxury. Right: In the foyer, Rossignuolo selected a blue/gray tone to complement the space's architectural elements like the sliding barn door that leads to the downstairs office.



neighbors have every right to be curious. In addition to the talented Rossignuolo, the award-winning architect Greg Howe of Searl Lamaster Howe Architects was enlisted for this sparkling renovation. Together with the home's very engaged and creative owner, they formed a remarkable collaboration.

Rossignuolo says when she arrived here 11 years ago after a design stint in London (followed by a whirlwind romance and marriage to a native Midwesterner), she was surprised by how timid most Chicagoans are in their design styles. "In Melbourne, no one's afraid of

drama. People here are more conservative than they are in London or Australia."

She's definitely not referring to her client for this project. He's a book-loving, piano-playing, art-collecting Ph.D. candidate who's just young enough to be fearless. When his real estate agent showed him a chopped-up 2,800-square-foot greystone in a neighborhood he loved, he immediately started brainstorming about how to turn it back into a single-family home. He says Searl Lamaster Howe Architects was an easy choice for the renovation.



"I like their clean aesthetic and the way they use shape very intelligently," says the client. "I didn't want a cookie-cutter house. I wanted distinctive features."

Those distinctive features are obvious as soon as the front door swings open. "One of the first things I asked for was a two-story, floor-to-ceiling bookshelf and Greg took that idea and ran with it," says the homeowner. Howe's first move was to clear out the walls and move the staircase to the center of the free-flowing space. He then encased the new stairs in an array of steel cables supporting terrazzo treads. The finishing touch was the bookcase, a very functional tower of shelves designed into the stairway that carries a literary collection two stories up to the soft glow of a new skylight.

"The homeowner likes modern, but he's the opposite of a minimalist," says Howe, pointing to the pleasantly cluttered reading nook that Rossignuolo carved out beneath the staircase. Defined by a swoopy

Womb Chair and a snappy, circular Angela Adams rug, it provides a spot of coziness in an otherwise modernist landscape. "He can sit in that comfortable chair and read and still be at the center of the house," notes Rossignuolo.

Clever architectural touches like a sliding barn door that conceals a downstairs office and a wide-open floor plan provided an alluring canvas for a designer with lots of colorful ideas. "In our first meeting with the client said he wasn't afraid of saturated color," says Rossignuolo. "He didn't want any white walls; he wanted warmth."

And if there's one thing a sun-baked Aussie knows, it's warmth. Rossignuolo chose a series of show-stopping wall treatments to establish a welcoming mood. In the living space alone, porridge-y taupe, steel blue and apple green walls play off an astonishing swath of lively patterned wallpaper that anchors the main staircase wall. "I wanted a sense of drama on the walls," Rossignuolo

Opposite page: The blinds in the dining room provided the palette for many of the designer's color choices, including the apple green used in the dining room area. Metal sculpture by David & Rick. Above: A vintage walnut dining table from Pegboard Modern is surrounded by the client's original red leather chairs. Overhead, Rossignuolo used the Tolomeo Double Suspension light from Design Within Reach as "a surprise element in the room."





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explains. “That wallpaper is on the most noticeable wall and I wanted big impact there. The pattern balances the staircase’s colder elements.” She says she painted the fireplace wall in taupe to soften the feel of the blackened steel mantel, and the dining room in a splashy green to draw the eye to the back of the house. “I liked the idea of doing the color in big splashes,” says the designer.

Rossignuolo’s secret weapon for such bold turns of the color wheel is white. She says even a show-stopping piece like the living room’s astonishing floor lamp can provide a calming influence if it’s white. “You need white when you’re working with this much color; the eye has to have somewhere to rest,” she says. Case in point

is the master bedroom where Rossignuolo created “a dark shell” using blue-gray wallcoverings and curtains in the same shade. She then added a boldly contrasting, bright white bed to emphasize the surrounding darker shades; the resulting space feels totally enveloping. “I love it. It’s like sleeping in a cave,” laughs the owner.

“Jenny did a great job. She brought a fresh perspective to this house,” says Howe. And the homeowner concurs: “When the sheers are drawn and you look in from the street at night you can see the shape of the piano and the chandelier over it and little bits of color—it looks so intriguing.” And nothing timid about it. ■

Opposite page: Amy Wilder’s Loops wallpaper from Urban Source gives the reading area instant style. Rossignuolo paired Eero Saarinen’s Womb chair for Knoll at Design Within Reach with an Angela Adams’ hand-tufted wool rug. Above: The outdoor dining area features high-functioning furniture that includes Pierre Lissoni’s Lizz chairs from Design Within Reach Outdoor and Room & Board’s Sonoma table.