

From Georgetown to U Street, D.C. has (interior) style

By **CAROL BUCKLEY**
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What is D.C. design? How can a room sum up Georgetown or Kalorama? Eight design teams recently tried to answer those questions, and the results are on display through December at the Washington Design Center.

The “Potomac Fever” design house, a stroll through historic communities in the District, shows how neighborhoods rely on their own history — as well as their role in national history — to shape a signature look.

Some designers didn’t have to travel far for inspiration. Christine Hecht Payne is a 10-year resident of Wesley Heights, the imagined location of her green dining room. The shade, said Hecht, was inspired by the Green Book, D.C.’s social register.

But Wesley Heights is green in other ways, said Hecht. “The neighborhood is known as a garden spot,” she said, gesturing at the garden nook she installed in an alcove.

Minimalism is not a big part of D.C. style, and Hecht’s room — like most here — reflects that. But she tames the abundance of detail with a few strategies. Cool white pops up again and again as a counterpoint to all the green. It keeps the eye moving around the room, from busts of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, to demilune tables that allude to the Jefferson Memorial’s columns, to white upholstered host and hostess chairs — the last a trend that’s popping up more and more as a way to avoid the dreaded matchy-matchy dining set.

Theme also unifies the space. The dining table’s centerpiece, a model of the Jefferson Memorial, is only one example of the Americana here. A toile presents Lady Liberty in a new colorway, pink and green, and paired obelisks reference the nearby Washington Monument. Even the crown molding, said Hecht, is a replica of that in the Lincoln bedroom.

See **Design**/Page 21

“I thought, ‘Let’s have fun. Let’s make it obvious,’” Hecht said of her none-too-subtle theme,

which she capped off with place cards reserving seats for former presidents.

No less shy in its celebration of its assigned location is the Georgetown living room. Designer Brooke Stuart left no corner without a reference to the historic neighborhood, from a bust of Georgetown University’s mascot, a bulldog, to a trompe l’oeil street map.

Just as the C&O Canal cuts through the heart of Georgetown, Stuart’s living room is bisected by a mosaic water wall crafted by a student artist with City Arts, the design house’s charity partner. The mosaic is an image of the Potomac River, and a constant stream of water flows over the art, giving the glass tiles an extra sparkle.

Visitors trawling for trends at “Potomac Fever” will notice a few repeat performers; most noticeable is designers’ penchant for mixing metallics. Gold and silver don’t have to be kept separate anymore, several rooms here demonstrate. They mingle on the rug and among accessories in the Georgetown room. The Capitol Hill library and the Massachusetts Avenue bedroom are entirely organized around the two neutrals.

But the boldest pairing of the two comes in the Kalorama parlor by Dana Tydings. A molten-gold wall covering (“It’s vinyl — you can just wipe it down!” said Tydings) pairs with curtains that shimmer in a silvery blue-gray. Gray stripes march along the paired sofas, and a golden-yellow chair waits nearby. A tiny end table there is the offspring of another trend — quatrefoils.

Tydings lets materials — shagreen armoires, Lucite plinths — carry her vision in the parlor, but in the adjoining vestibule she knew she needed a different approach. “There’s not usually a lot of furniture in these spaces, so I imagined a glass-enclosed vestibule” over a koi pond, Tydings said. After all, “doesn’t everyone have a koi pond



in their vestibule in Kalorama?" she asked with a laugh.

Maybe not, but this easy-care version, painted directly on the floor, is a nature-inspired preview of the parlor to come. The parlor's gold here is the orange of a goldfish, also echoed by a pillow on a chair and ottoman upholstered in oyster gray, a hint of the parlor's silver tones.

The outdoors gets another nod from tree-patterned wallpaper and petrified wood stumps strewn near the chair.

Visitors won't expect to find budget design ideas in the Kalorama rooms, and — tree stumps aside — they won't find many. For those, head to the U Street artist's studio, where Lori Ludwick used inexpensive materials — plaster, salvaged wood planks — in inventive ways to create a space that needs little furniture to be interesting.

Those raw wood planks, for example, line the rear wall and add great texture to the room. But Ludwick didn't stop there: She randomly glued tiny Swarovski crystals in the wood's nooks and crannies "for a bit of sparkle," she said.

The ongoing popularity of purple in interior design is on display here, too, most notably on a massive console that grounds the stu-

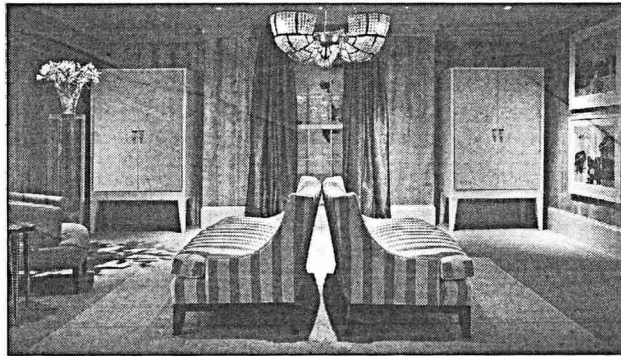
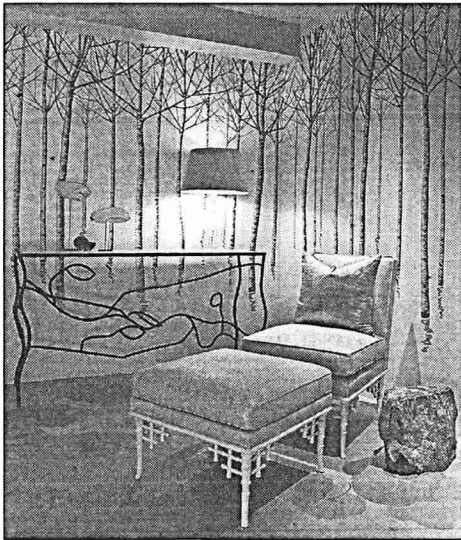
dio. "The table started everything," Ludwick said of the piece, which pairs a thick top lacquered a bright purple with a classically ornate carved-wood base.

Ludwick cuts her purple with mustard yellow, but designer Beverly Claiborne chose to pair chartreuse with the plums in her LeDroit Park foyer. The historic neighborhood's Victorian architecture dictated the room's formal elements, said Claiborne, while the color scheme and accessories bring it up to date. Those traditional elements include a moss-green camelback sofa with fringe detail and a central table inscribed with a classic Greek key pattern.

Modern elements are here, too, including a sparkle-crusted Alex Turco painting and unexpected lighting fixtures in the forms of bubbles and links of chains.

Claiborne is enthusiastic about the connections between her design and the neighborhood that inspired her. But at the end of the day, she said, good design isn't about what neighborhood you live in. "I design for comfort and style," Claiborne said. "That's a combination that works" at any address.

The "Potomac Fever" design house is open through Dec. 12 at the Washington Design Center at 300 D St. SW. Admission is free.



Courtesy of Washington Design Center

Designer Dana Tydings imagined a glass-walled atrium, above, as the intro to her “Kalorama” parlor, right, in the Washington Design Center’s “Potomac Fever” house, on display through Dec. 12.