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HEN Melody and Steve Von Ruden bought their home in Portland, Oregon, “it felt right from the minute we walked in. CJ’s artwork was the icing on the cake.” The previous owners had restored the 1912 house, even commissioning CJ Hurley to create a fantasy forest in the dining room frieze. “Our guests’ reactions are just so fun to watch!” Melody says. “It’s a conversation starter . . . most people absolutely love it.”

When the Von Rudens decided to paint the exterior, they, too, went to CJ Hurley and Barbara Pierce, who live four blocks away, for color consultation. “We said, ‘we want it warm and welcoming, but true to the period.’” Barbara and CJ produced a custom scheme that suited house and clients. [text cont. on p. 84]

The FOREST EVERGREEN

THE DINING ROOM IS TRULY
A WORK OF ART, THANKS TO
TRUSTING COLLABORATION.

BY PATRICIA POORE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY BILL LUSK



ABOVE: The 1912 house is a quintessential Arts & Crafts Bungalow in Portland, Oregon. **LEFT:** The dining room has original woodwork, sideboard, and windows. The stained-glass panel is recent work by Melody Von Ruden’s sister, Debra Schulze.



IT'S PERSONAL

Unlike wallpaper or stencils, this work is commissioned fine art—and CJ Hurley says that means he has a relationship with the clients. “I take a personal approach,” he explains, “whether I’m painting or even doing color consulting. Certainly for any interior design, I have to understand their imagery, what’s symbolic for them.” ■ The relationship gets even cozier when CJ moves in. Even if the project is only an hour and a half away, he says, he’s been up on a scaffold for eight or ten hours and he just doesn’t have the commute in him. So “it can get very personal, and I am very careful about my clients’ privacy,” he says. ■ When asked about his design process, paints, or artist techniques, CJ demurs. “The way my work has evolved, it’s a bit like the days of the Renaissance,” he says. “You know, the artist would put screens around him while he worked, so no one would see the process—it was coveted knowledge.” His clients do, often, watch him work. But they keep mum. “We have mutual confidentiality,” CJ says. “I don’t talk about their lives, and they don’t tell my secrets.”

ABOVE: The “Forest Evergreen” incorporates motifs and symbols important to the client. **RIGHT:** Barbara Pierce and CJ Hurley were commissioned to create the exterior colors. **FAR RIGHT:** (and detail) The hand-painted work is done in custom-mixed colors. **BELOW:** CJ and Barbara (center) with homeowners Steve and Melody.





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The bungalow's Douglas fir woodwork has its original shellac finish. CJ Hurley's artwork is inspired by European and American art movements and such artist-architects as C. R. Mackintosh, Victor Horta, Josef Hoffmann, Greene & Greene, and Frank Lloyd Wright.

The artist eschews computer-aided design, uses custom-mixed paints, and prefers hand painting to stencils. His interiors are fine art, executed in archival-quality materials.

REFERRING TO HIS commissioned interiors, Hurley admits that “what I do is for the rare client. It’s not fast, it’s highly technical, and it’s hyper-labor-intensive . . . I have hideously hunched shoulders.” In this case, the clients—previous owners—told him they wanted to feel surrounded by evergreen forest. The husband was passionate about nature, but his role as a doctor left little time for him to be outside. Symbolism is woven into the design: “For example, Celtic knots that show up in roots refer to Dan’s Scottish heritage,” Hurley explains.

This project logged 324 hours, 215 of them in on-site drawing and painting. “I do remember it went over time, and we added some elements,” the artist recalls. (Clients agree to a project price beforehand, which is not contingent on the actual time spent.) A room frieze or some feature painting runs \$8,000–10,000. The top end might be a really intricate room with a lot of painted

surfaces, running \$25,000. “I’d say my average project runs between \$14,000 and 18,000.”

This sort of wall art is uncommon today, and has been “since the Depression years of the WPA,” says CJ Hurley, who also maintains a fine-arts studio producing works in watercolor, acrylics, mixed media, gesso, and metalwork including *répoussé*. (He also offers several limited-edition works.)

“I would love to have one of CJ’s art pieces someday,” Melody Von Ruden says. For his part, CJ Hurley says that the house couldn’t have found better next-owners. “You can imagine that we worried about what would happen. Would somebody come in and paint the walls white?” No way. ✦

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