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50 Cents

Inspiration Renovation

■ Former Peninsula resident Amely Wurmbrand credits the architecture of her alma maters, Ridgecrest Intermediate School and Palos Verdes High School, for shaping her design style.

By Carrie Yamato
Special to the News

When Seattle residents want an interior designer whose specialty is mid-century modern, there's a good chance they'll hire Amely Wurmbrand.

"I get a lot of clients who appreciate modern and call me," said Wurmbrand, whose award-winning designs have been featured in several shelter magazines. "I am known for my work with mid-century modern homes and have a lot of knowledge in that specific style and era."

Wurmbrand first became aware of the clean-line and open-space style of architecture at the University of Colorado at Boulder. "I took a lot of classes in art history and became enamored with the mid-century architecture period," she said. "I read all about its roots ... how it was born from the Bauhaus in Germany and [from the style of] Frank Lloyd Wright."

But while studying design at Cornish College of the Arts in Washington, she realized her penchant for the mid-century look might have been shaped long before her college

days.

"I was looking through a book and discovered that Ridgecrest and PV High were both designed by Richard Neutra, a very famous mid-century architect," said Wurmbrand. "At that time, I was really into Richard Neutra. I was living in a mid-century style home. My husband grew up in a Richard Neutra home ... Then when I realized I grew up in his buildings, it became very full circle to me. Neutra was a master at [blurring interior and exterior spaces], and you can see it all over his work at Ridgecrest and PV High."

While Wurmbrand has found a perfect career for her interests and talents, interior design wasn't always her professional calling. She also pursued a career in jazz singing and is a talented painter.

"I thought she was going to be a painter," said her dad, Michael Wurmbrand. "She was excellent. Now, she expresses her artistic capabilities through her work."

"I've always been involved in interior design and construction," said Wurmbrand, who remodeled her three homes before the age of 22. "But it took me a while to realize that interior design was a profession and that not all people spent time and energy thinking about the way their spaces work."

A modern movement

According to Wurmbrand, mid-century architecture is making a big comeback. The style reflects the time period when Americans moved away from live-in help and complicated living arrangements, and therefore the homes' space arrangement is informal.

"The floor plans are fabulous," said Wurmbrand. "The public spaces are big, and the



Tom Underhill, Peninsula News

Interior designer Amely Wurmbrand visits one of her favorite architectural spots at Ridgecrest Intermediate School.

homes usually have a great room, which is perfect for large gatherings. It's honest and relaxed and easy to live in.

"People are starting to see its architectural purity," she continued. "There's a huge interest. It's become a collector's thing. If you live in a Richard Neutra house, you have a piece of art."

And for those people who might not feel completely comfortable with the starkness of the modern style, Wurmbrand is doing her part to make them feel more at ease.

"While a lot of my work is mid-century modern, I'm doing it in a way where it's warm," she said. "I think it was actually born that way, but it went through this strange period where people tried to do it as clean and minimalist as possible, and it lost a little soul. I'm working with it in a way that is a little more homey."

Ridgecrest reunions

Although Wurmbrand hasn't lived on the Peninsula since graduating from PV

High in 1989, she flies down to Los Angeles a couple times a month for work-related projects — she has worked on two HGTV shows and remodeled a kitchen — to see her family, and, of course, to check out Neutra's work at her alma maters.

"I like to go down there to see how he did things in a public setting," said Wurmbrand. "He had a very holistic approach to his buildings and how they were set into their environment."

Wurmbrand says she now uses the same method when designing for a client.

"I spend a lot of time looking at the views in my clients' homes and using the surrounding landscape to form the colors and textures of the interiors," she said. "His idea has had a big influence on me ... in part because I experienced it in such a wonderful way."

For more information on Amely Wurmbrand Designs, log on to her Web site at www.amelydesigns.com.