

Habitat

High-Style Tiles

Amely Wurmbrand uses mosaic and tiles to lend artful touches to her modern Shoreline home.

By [Christopher Werner](#)



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A bathroom backsplash works with a low- slung sink to create Asian-inspired allure.

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LIKE MANY EYE-CATCHING, contemporary Northwest dwellings, Amely Wurmbrand's Shoreline home thrives on a clean layout and the beauty of its natural surroundings. Considering she is both an artist and interior designer who uses decorative wall tile as a staple of her work, it's no wonder the place is a visual playground. The kitchen backsplash, to take one dramatic example, is a kaleidoscopic mosaic of glittering tiles in tans, grays, blues, and ivory, with an occasional splash of red. From a distance it suggests a big city at night—random clusters of light

bursting here, blue water pockets pooling over there. Up close it's an indecipherable puzzle of multisize circles and squares. Either way, there's little to no order or rationality to the canvas. Running your fingers along it feels like caressing the pebbles of a shallow stream.

"I like a lot of texture in my work, and tile can be very artistic and can add interest," Wurmbrand said, rifling through her crates of tile samples—one slightly kitsch with a glass finish, some raised in the middle, many with busy but perfectly coordinated palettes of color. "Tile is the jewelry of the project."

In 1997, when Wurmbrand and her husband Craig Rosenberg, a software engineer, purchased the flat-roofed 1962 four-bedroom house, the original, crammed kitchen shared "a double-wide kind of rec room" with the dining area, while the living room hid behind a massive sandstone fireplace barrier that blocked the flow. It just didn't make sense.

After living in the house for a few years Wurmbrand and Rosenberg began a two-stage renovation project: an interior remodel and the addition of a whole new wing. In her design practice, Wurmbrand asks clients to write an essay detailing what they like and dislike about their home, and also what they hope to get out of a remodel. Had Wurmbrand written one for herself, the midcentury's floor plan would no doubt top her "dislike" list. She and her husband considered multiple designs and, in the end, made a radical choice. They reversed the layout. The living room became the kitchen. Today, two oblong blocks converge at a 90-degree angle. One rectangle used to be the whole house; the other now contains Wurmbrand's workspace and Rosenberg's lower-level studio. Each is flanked by generous windows that take in dense forestry and startling views of Puget Sound.

They kept the big stone fireplace edifice—so *Brady Bunch*—but trimmed one side considerably (while elongating the other) to accommodate better traffic flow and a growing family. Next they sandblasted that wall's white paint to reveal the underlying Wilkerson stone, a material from Eastern Washington popular in the 1960s. The view from the main entryway reveals an open floor plan with a seamless flow through kitchen, dining, and living areas.



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Jewelry of the project The tiles mesh with original elements such as the fireplace, but help achieve a more modern feel.

Artsy touches are everywhere. In the main-floor bathroom a seashell-toned backsplash and a graceful sink bowl sitting atop sleek mahogany drawers conjure a Japanese theme, which Wurmbrand accentuated with a hand-painted cherry blossom tree sprawling across the shower wall—“so I would always be reminded of the brightness and happiness of spring.” Even the hallway is plastered with paintings by her six-year-old son Brandon: “Our new art gallery,” she beamed.

Nowhere is Wurmbrand’s stamp more visible than in the kitchen. “I wanted to do a kitchen renovation, but I wanted it to feel as if it’d always been here. I knew I had to use a tile that was kind of artsy, because something that was truly period was not going to work and something truly current was not going to work,” Wurmbrand explained. “Finding the right tiles was really, really challenging because there are just so few things that would’ve been used at the time this house was built,” she added.



A bathroom backsplash works with a low- slung sink to create Asian-inspired allure.

Thanks to a recent surge in design awareness manufacturers are producing myriad materials, giving her more resources when working with clients now.

But at the time of her remodel she settled on a tile with a glaze and materials that would've been around in the '60s that would still fit with the newer stainless steel cabinets with back-painted glass and the double-tiered island and snack bar topped by honed Crema Marfil counters. As in the rest of her home, the pairing strikes a balance between modern and midcentury.

Sprinkled throughout is an eclectic mix of vintage furniture styles, but in keeping with the theme of the house much of it is refinished or reimagined. "I like the character the vintage furniture brings, and I feel it helps anchor the room to the period of the house. Had I left the pieces as I had found them, however, the look would have felt dated."

Today the house nestled at the end of a long driveway is anything but dated. Wurmbrand's touches straddle styles from the past and present, and the result is timeless.

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