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Distinctly their own

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Curtis Popp welcomed a guest to his Land Park home, offered a drink and served the ice water in a canning jar.

It was not classless. It was classic.

Popp, a designer and practitioner of interior architecture, makes esthetic choices deliberately.

The Ball-jar-as-tumbler was a suitable example of his approach to furnishing his home: The humble glassware looks good – few designs have needed as little alteration over the decades – it's practical and it suits the family's budget.

He and his wife, Susan, like the glasses, although she added: "We have, like, Baccarat crystal."

Popp's professional interiors include work at the Sutter Brownstones, Ginger Elizabeth Chocolates, Masullo Pizza and the Retro Lodge, where he has his office.

Those clean, modern designs differ in some ways from what Popp has chosen for his own house – home to a family that consists of him, Susan, who is a nurse, 8-year-old Olivia and 6-year-old Fletcher.

In 2002, Curtis Popp bought a 60-year-old house. Only one family had lived in it before then. Sixty years. One owner. Probate sale.

Needless to say, the 1941 home was not immaculate when he got it.

That was fine with Popp. "It was perfect," he said. "It was like a blank canvas."

Popp, the son of an artist, knew what to do with the canvas. He and his family have stamped their personalities on the small – under 1,500 square feet – home.

Popp spends all day around top-of-the-line furniture and fixtures. At home, he was happy to keep the original doors and kitchen cabinets.

The drawers don't glide like high-end contemporary cabinetry, but they look right for the house. The oven in the vintage O'Keefe and Merritt stove doesn't work like the new Italian Bertazzonis that went into the Sutter Brownstones, but the griddle is great and the look, again, is right.

It isn't the heat that anchors the kitchen, though, it's the cool.

Popp has a tall, icebox-look German refrigerator that he picked up at a big discount, because it was a bright yellow floor model.

"I'm always looking for a deal," he said, but he's also happy with the color. "That kind of sets the tone."

It balances the ebony-stained hardwood floor (which continues throughout the house) and the light paint job. Pops of color in the kitchen and in the adjacent laundry room echo the refrigerator's yellow.

The sparse cabinetry is augmented by open, industrial-style kitchen shelving where the containers – like the drinking jars – are as much visual as functional.

Out on the shelves, kids' cereal in glass containers is fun, even attractive. That's a switch from ugly cardboard boxes hidden in the cabinets.

You can see something similar in the bathroom, where a pyramid of bathroom tissue looks more like sculpture than storage.

There are real sculptures and plenty of original paintings throughout the house.

"I grew up the son of an artist," he said. "I think it's important to buy art you love."

The Popp's art ranges from a pricey work by Michael Stevens that combines painting and sculpture in a surreal fashion to ceramic works by developmentally disabled artists at the Short Center. The latter are displayed just as prominently as the more expensive pieces.

One Short Center piece – a rough, standing ceramic human figure – is ensconced in the living room fireplace behind glass, like a museum piece.

Both the Stevens and the ceramic figure echo the whimsy of the yellow fridge and demonstrate a philosophy that design needn't be dead serious.

Much of the rest of the living room is an eclectic showcase of some classic designs: seating by Eames, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe.

You could find styles like these in museums, but much of it – like the refrigerator – was purchased used or at bargain prices.

"We love high design when we can afford to do that," Popp said.

A pair of Eames molded fiberglass chairs were picked up for under \$50 at a garage sale, though just one can go for several hundred dollars.

Though much of the furniture is older than its owners, "I'm not really a retro guy," Popp said. Instead, he's driven by the design.

Once more: esthetic, practical, budget-minded.

The budget approach is constant, but the esthetic approach changes dramatically in the Popp's bathroom.

Eclectic, fun and colorful are watchwords throughout the rest of the house. The bathroom is muted and very coherent in its design. "It's very modern in here," Popp said.

When they moved in, the bathroom typified the era when the home was built. It featured pink and purple tile, a tiny shower stall, a built-in tub.

It now looks much like something you would see in an ultramodern boutique hotel.

Popp went into an adjoining space to make a more spacious, glass-enclosed shower that continues up to a rooftop skylight.

He designed a cabinet for the sink.

The mirror is surrounded by granite cut by a friend, artist Craig Haarmeyer. Haarmeyer also did a large painting that hangs in the Popp's small dining space.

The bathtub is surrounded by a diaphanous curtain and a shelf of candles.

It's a "spa experience," Popp said.

Susan Popp likes "pulling the curtains and pretending like you're somewhere else," she said.

A relaxing thought, but not exactly a reality.

The design in this home fits its owners' personalities so closely, she couldn't be anywhere else but at home.

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Curtis Popp's dining room and kitchen, above, display a convergence of eye-popping color and industrial chic.