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In an eclectic condo, styles collide — beautifully

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**BOULEVARD**

THE MAGAZINE OF URBAN LIVING THE ARTS PEOPLE FOOD HOMES

**WALKING INTO** Deborah Page Schneider's condominium is like entering a museum, but not the airless kind full of fossils, stuffed animals and dusty dioramas depicting life in prehistoric times. This is a museum of contemporary art — the life-sized cosmorama of a woman who collects pieces from around the world and mixes them with Italian furniture and yard-sale castoffs to create an oasis of modern design.



**Previous Page:** The wrap-around patio is lit by UK designer Tom Dixon's award-winning "Jack Light." **Above:** The living room features leather Cassini 'Maralunga' couches, Moroso's 'Anti-Body' chair and a credenza by Ennezero. **Right:** Brad Miller's large twig sculpture separates the living and dining rooms.

There is the Tom Dixon armchair — black, sleek and fit for Cruella de Vil. There is the punk-pop mural by Alejandro Gehry, son of architect Frank Gehry. There is the Memphis cabinet, created by the Milan-based rule breakers of the 1980s, a perfect example of the designers' choice of gaudy colours, kitsch motifs and unconventional materials.

But Schneider doesn't have any snobbishness about her collection. It isn't all high-end. Two bedside tables in the guestroom were bought at Surroundings in Cook Street Village, whose owner found them left in the rain by the side of the road on Salt Spring Island. An outdoor table and chair set were bought at London Drugs. The two-ton San Francisco safe was found at Price's Lock & Safe in Victoria.

It's a combination that ought not to work and might not under another's care, but Schneider has a curator's eye for mixing the beautiful with the highly unusual. This becomes exceedingly clear in her choice of accent table — a life-sized, black hog made of fibreglass from the Netherlands and with a



round table top centred on its massive head. Only a woman who is confident not only of her taste but of her sense of humour could pull this off.

"I love the giant pig," says Schneider, who had an art gallery in Santa Monica, Calif. for three years. "I love the highs and lows of art. I love gallery to garage sale."

Schneider, 57, is on the phone from Austin, Texas where she and her husband live most of the year. They took a condo



**Above:** The kitchen's marble counters come from Campbell River.

**Right:** The dining room features a Peder Mooi table with Flos Skygarden lighting.

in this building 12 years ago when their two sons attended Brentwood College in Mill Bay. The youngest graduated in 2004 and the Schneiders realized something about their temporary home: they didn't want to give it up.

"We thought we'd leave when the kids grew up but we fell in love with the city. Victoria is the most relaxing place on the planet for us," says Schneider.

One of her neighbours was George Kidd, the first Canadian ambassador to Israel, and Canada's ambassador to Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Schneider says Kidd was an avid art and book collector. She remembers meeting him in the elevator and talking to him about art. "He invited me up to see his etchings," she laughs.

That visit never happened but when Kidd died in 2004, Schneider bought his penthouse condo. The first thing she did was gut it. The second thing she did was hire Victoria-based Bruce Wilkin as her designer.

Schneider knew she wanted a black and white palette. "I love colour," she says. "But for contemporary art, I adore black and white."

To deliver on Schneider's vision, Wilkin sourced carpeting from California to cover the 2,682-square foot space and had



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it custom-coloured a rich charcoal. The floors in the kitchen and bathroom are covered in tiling — tiny black, white and grey tiles the size of micro dots, 1,000 tiles per square foot. The walls are white and much of the furniture is black. The counter tops in the kitchen and bathrooms are made of charcoal-coloured marble quarried in Campbell River. The same marble surrounds the fireplace in the living room.

The black and white motif is saved from feeling cold by slashes of red — a pillow, a piece of art, small objects here and there.

Schneider is quick to credit Wilkin for his openness to her unique style. “We collaborated very well,” she says. “Bruce can put himself into any situation and not force his own tastes on the space.”



Details abound from benches of art magazines to a bed custom-made by Victoria's Gabriel Ross. The bathroom's black and white theme has birch wallpaper, mini chandeliers and micro-mosaic floor tiles.

Wilkin is showing me through the condo and mulling over the question about how he would describe Schneider's style. He agrees eclectic is overused and has lost its meaning. He coins a new phrase.

“Considered eclecticism,” he says. “There are no boundaries. This is a one-of-a-kind space that reflects Deb's personality and exuberance.”

Evidence of that exuberance is everywhere, from the line of sardine-can



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art that snakes across her counter to the Rolling Stones' Sticky Fingers pillow on her living room couch. An old church pew is in the bedroom, while in the hallway, an 80s chandelier has just been installed.

She says some pieces were chosen for the space and others were taken from her collection in Austin. "This space has been edited," says Schneider. "I put something in and really look at it. If it doesn't work, I take it away."

Schneider's international tastes include Canadian art. She has pieces by prominent Canadians such as Marion Scott and Ronald Bloore and up-and-coming Victoria artists including Tyler Hodgins, Robert Randall and Shawn Shepherd.

Like collectors everywhere, Schneider admits she does not always know where to stop. She collects art glass, Canadian souvenir plates – even McDonald's mugs.

Wilkin laughs. "Dejunking Deb was a challenge," he says.

Schneider says her favourite room is the living room. "When you sit in that room and look out you see Mount Baker and the ocean, the Sooke Hills and downtown. At night, the lights below look like a fairy land. It's a very peaceful spot."

A large, sculptural object hangs on one wall between the living room and kitchen. By American artist Brad Miller, it takes up most of the wall. Schneider explains that it is made of branches that have been dipped in liquid truck-bed liner and formed to create a large, black ball-like structure full

of complicated shapes.

Wilkin looks at it. "The blob," he says with the bemused tone of a designer who came to love his client's enthusiasm for art. It seems to symbolize both the joys and the challenges of creating Schneider's vision for her Victoria home. "How do you hang a 100-pound blob of sticks and tar on the wall?"

How do you? After a little head-scratching, Wilkin used a two-inch number 10 screw in a reinforced wood backing behind the drywall. "It held. You don't want it falling off during a dinner party."