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Brilliant ideas and beautiful things for the home of your dreams

## Interior and furniture designer Carol Poet—an interview



*Getting Home Design became familiar with Carol Poet's work as a designer through her fabulously inventive Reclining Dinner Chair. We marveled at the way she took into consideration the whole physical experience of dining. This became the impetus for us to find out more about her design sensibilities and how she works with her clients.*

GHD

You're a designer with many talents, furniture and interior design among them. I'm curious about where you see the intersection, the cross-over between these two important aspects of design.

CP

The cross over comes naturally to me. Sometimes it's easier to design a piece than to go out looking for it, because the right piece may or may not even exist. One of the challenges has been making the pieces. I've had to identify local fabricators who are really good at making high-end traditional furniture, as well as contemporary, Spanish-influenced design and all other styles.

We have a lot of good craftsmen in the Los Angeles area. It's a matter of working with them and communicating the spirit of the design. We go to them with drawings but there are often the subtle innuendos that need to be communicated and these cannot always be conveyed by way of drawings.

GHD

What is your particular style?

**"Sometimes it's easier to design a piece than to go out looking for it, because the right piece may or may not even exist."**

**CP**

I love working in all styles. What a project becomes stylistically is based on discussions with the client, as well as cues from the architecture. Being open-minded has made the business fun and interesting. Working on a traditional house in the morning and a contemporary house in the afternoon, for example, keeps the work lively and fresh.

**GHD**

What types of woods and finishes do you prefer to use in your furniture design? How would you characterize the designs, stylistically?

**CP**

Poet Furniture is about clean lines made with beautiful materials. I've designed pieces that I love, that are needed in the market. Some of these are universal in style, appropriate for a wide range of projects. There are some pieces that have a slightly contemporary or deco feel and influence. I love the deco era. The designers had an appreciation for beautiful lines and woods, which I love.

We use macassar ebony, anigre, sapele, burl woods, curly maple, along with mahogany, walnut, and oak. The oak pieces tend to have a lot of grain, so we'll generally give them a ceruse finish.

**GHD**

When you couldn't find the perfect piece of furniture for executing an overall design, you created the design for the furniture yourself. Did you have a prior interest in furniture design, or did the new-found exercise of design inspiration come out of necessity?

**CP**

About 25 years ago I was looking for a settee for someone's home. All I could find was either contemporary or "carved to death" settees. So I created my own design. This settee was one the many inspirations in creating a line of furniture.

More recently people have been asking for coffee tables that are ottomans. They are great for the comfort of elevating your feet while relaxing, but where do you put your drink? So, I designed a coffee table/ottoman with built-in trays that slide out to give you a place for your glass and plate. This piece is called the Cubist Ottoman. It also has a huge, deep drawer for storage.

Another piece is a vanity stool called the Chanel. It has a handle on the back for ease to pull back and forth. It also has a swivel seat.

The most important piece is the Reclining Dinner Chair. When I was at a dinner party, one of the guests leaned back on a fragile French chair. The back snapped and the chair fell apart. The guest wasn't hurt, but felt terribly embarrassed. We have lovely dinner parties where we spend hours at the table. One shouldn't always have to sit upright. Because of the need, the design came naturally. A horrifying moment became an aha moment.

We have a beautifully simple piece called the Welles Chest. It was natural to also offer it with a hydraulic TV that comes out of the top.

The Barrymore Desk comes with lots of options, depending on one's office/home office needs.

The X Bench has many lives. It can be a bench with a cushion on top. It can also be a coffee table with a simple inlay on top or have an etched mirror top. This bench is most effective when it is made and finished in a light wood, because the diamond shaped stretcher is dark espresso and it appears to slice thru to the front of the legs.

**GHD**

As a ten-year-old, you took on many responsibilities in the home, because your parents both worked outside the home. How has this experience shaped who you



are as a designer?

**CP**

Hugely. My father was very artistic, I got some of my artistry from him. I would always move furniture around. I learned how to take care of a house and a family. Designers are sometimes looked to for a style-of-living image in order to make a home comfortable. I learned at an early age how a house functions. And so it comes naturally to me to learn the answers to questions like — How do the people live in the house? How do they use the spaces? How many children does the family have? Do they have pets? Do they cook? Do they have formal or informal dinner parties?

I learned to sew at a young age because I wanted things which my parents couldn't afford to provide for me. This has allowed me to go into a drapery or upholstery workroom and ask for something that they may think can't be done. I have been known to pick up a needle and thread and suggest possible ways of doing something that they are telling me is impossible. I would probably never have learned these skills had I grown up in a household where I didn't have to be concerned with domestic tasks. So this has been an advantage to me.

**GHD**

You worked for about a decade with an architectural / interior design firm, Landa-Poet Design Associates. Was working in an environment where architecture and building design were front and center useful to you, and how so?

**CP**

Working there changed my life completely. I learned so much from Sharon. She creates great structures and also knows how to create a proper addition to an existing structure. It is important to know how you can push and pull with the architecture. What I got with Sharon was huge. I will look at the structure first and assess if it has needs, as well as more needs from the client's requirements. It is important to do this before starting the decorating and furnishings. The furnishings should be moved into a perfectly buttoned-up shell.

**GHD**

What's your biggest challenge in working with clients? How do you get them to open up to you and let you know what they're really after, as opposed what they think initially they might want?

**CP**

I want to make the client feel comfortable. It's a tricky thing. You want to get them to open up, but I don't want to be invasive. The interior design process for residential is very personal. Their home is going to be the place they return to at the end of the day; their sanctuary that is meant to ground them.

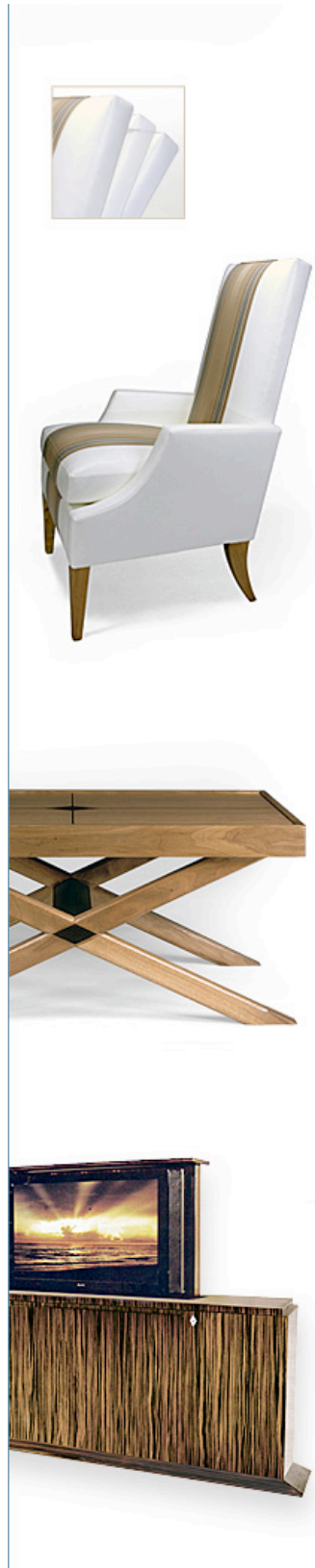
Living in Hollywood is interesting because sometimes people will want to be perceived living in one way, but really behind the scenes, they want to live another way, although they don't want to admit this. They want the public rooms to be grand, opulent, but in the family room and bedrooms, they may want less formality. I can help them make these private spaces livable. It's complex getting into the psyches of the clients, finding out who they are and how they really want to live.

**GHD**

What's the biggest reward and satisfaction for you as a designer in working with clients?

**CP**

When we become friends after the job is finished. They're proud to show their new environment, whether it is their home or their office to their friends and associates. They're happy to recommend Poet Design, because it's been a positive experience. I try not to develop a close and personal relationship when we're working together. When the professional part is complete, we can become lifelong friends. That speaks volumes to me. ♦



visit Carol Poet's [web site](#).



GettingHome Design | 90 Hamilton Street, Cambridge, MA 02139 | 617.492.2525 | [info@gettinghomedesign.com](mailto:info@gettinghomedesign.com)

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