

Personalities



ANYTHING BUT BORING

*Interior designer
Jeff Schlarb delivers
spaces with a sense of style
— and a sense of humor.*

BY ANH-MINH LE

“More and more,” says **Jeff Schlarb**, “people come to us looking for something a little different, a little eclectic and, dare I say, a little more rad.” Indeed, the designer and his namesake firm (jeffschlarb.com) have cultivated a reputation for thinking outside the box. Case in point: his inaugural San Francisco Decorator Showcase effort in 2011. A bedroom was split in half, yielding two spaces with identical floor plans, furniture, patterns and textures. The only difference was the palettes — neutral on one side, colorful on the other. The dividing wall included a large cut-out with a frame bordering it, acting as a “mirror” that allowed visitors to see both versions of the room at once.

While Schlarb’s portfolio is rife with interiors that include a healthy dose of wit, he notes that “if you strip back some of those layers [of the design], there’s a contemporary-classic look. The overwhelming feel of a space is that it’s well-proportioned and it’s rooted in some classic elegance. And then you can pepper in these oddities, this wildness.” He and his team take their tasks seriously, yet also prioritize having fun. “We’re making lives beautiful through interiors; it doesn’t have to be this enormous weight of the world,” Schlarb says. “It can have humor.”

In describing his process, Schlarb invokes the experience of walking through an art gallery opening: A work stops you in your tracks and propels you to take a closer look — perhaps to explore the relationship between mediums or marvel at fine penwork. “A room can make you stop and think for a second, ‘Did I see that right?’” he says. “That’s when I feel like we’ve hit on something. I’m not looking for madness, but curiosity.”

INSIDE THE DESIGNER'S MIND

1. Go Bold

For their Palo Alto home, an art-collecting couple was drawn to Schlarb's penchant for including quirky and compelling focal points in his rooms. "After driving through the suburbs to get home, she didn't want something soft and peaceful; no beige linen," says Schlarb of the wife. To that end, the entry's only piece of furniture is an antique bullhorn-adorned mirror and table set from Austria that counterbalances the clients' contemporary art. A bespoke **Kyle Bunting** rug — a geometric arrangement of multi-colored hide pieces — relates to the palette in the adjacent dining room. There, Schlarb installed a Timorous Beasties toile wallpaper in a custom colorway (cream and gray with silver accents). Atop the dining table, beaded figures by **Jan Huling** add a playful touch. The chandelier is by **Lindsey Adelman**.



2. Easeful & Eclectic

"Since this is a room where the kids spend time and watch movies, the directive was to create an eclectic space that's also very cozy," says Schlarb, who opted for "a neutral palette that's layered in a way that's still simple and neat." Take the seating: The body of the custom sofa is covered in a solid textured fabric by Romo while the arms are a subtle pattern by Casamance, and the nearby armchair features different upholstery on the back and seat cushions. Although the Stark Carpet rug and **Lindsay Cowles** wallpaper add further visual interest, Schlarb knew the space could benefit from another special element. "We were searching for the item that catches you and makes you ask, 'Whoa, what's that?'" In this Pacific Heights interior, that would be the Noir fiber cement side table with a base composed of a pair of hands.

3. Off the Wall

Schlarb views the annual San Francisco Decorator Showcase as an opportunity to "try something new that hasn't been done before," he says. "We want to be original every time." In 2018, for his fourth Showcase, he recalls perusing a book of wallpapers with "so many materials that were nuts" — among them, a design consisting of clothing price tags complete with the plastic fasteners. He ultimately opted for a **Tracy Kendall** motif that's essentially row upon row of fringe. While the composition is on the feminine side, his color choice — navy — made it more masculine. "In the end, it was very soothing, and it felt more like a soft material on the wall." In another ingenious move, Schlarb achieved the illusion of greater height by introducing a light-colored Glamora wallpaper on the ceiling, in the middle of the room.



4. The Light Fantastic

This kitchen in a modern San Francisco residence checks all the boxes for luxe living, with trappings such as Calacatta marble countertops and lacquered Arclinea cabinetry. So Schlarb decided to add a bit of edge to it. "We really needed to have a light fixture that had a material that would be repeated somewhere later in the room — that's brass — and we needed it to have a personality because the rest of the kitchen is pretty staid," Schlarb explains. For years he had been looking for the perfect project in which to incorporate **Lindsey Adelman's** lighting design composed of old clamps procured from manufacturers throughout the U.S. that are then plated in brass. The industrial nature of the clamps as well as the chains connecting them provide a striking contrast to the unique blown-glass forms.