



Fritz Jünker and his girlfriend, Kristina Burns, strolling out the door of his condo to sample the charms of downtown Portland.



# High-rise **RENEWAL**

*Passion and craft enliven the remodel of a sleek, modern condo in downtown Portland*

By **Brian Libby** ■ Photography **Ty Milford**

Jünker's cat, Mike Rice, sunbathes away the afternoon on the curving white-leather living room sofa while Jünker's design of his condo plays on the television.



ABOVE: Jünker and Burns like to enjoy appetizers and drinks at the kitchen counter, which the designer-builder opened to the living room by removing a wall.

RIGHT: Although Jünker's musician days are mostly over, his bass is displayed in the living room not only as a memento, but as a symbol of the craftsmanship he hopes to achieve.



In the 2009 book *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, author Matthew Crawford writes, "There are fewer occasions for the kind of spiritedness that is called forth when we take things in hand for ourselves, whether to fix them or make them." It took time for Fritz Jünker to take this notion of fulfillment through craftsmanship to heart.

In the past he'd tried his hand at a variety of artistic endeavors: running a historic theater, founding a nonprofit music organization, even producing an indie comedy film. But when he discovered how craft and design could combine into something greater than the sum of their parts, the heart of a master builder began to emerge. Nowhere is this more visible than in his own condo, a unit in the landmark Portland Plaza that Jünker remodeled and reimagined.

The Portland Plaza was built in 1973 and was one of the first high-rise condominiums in the city. With its aluminum and glass cladding and its curving form, it oozes modern chic. "I was wandering around downtown one day and I saw it from the Keller Fountain," Jünker recalls. "I was instantly enamored." The Portland Plaza is also ideally situated for enjoying the city, positioned just across from the Keller Fountain on SW Fourth Avenue along the newest MAX light rail line, and just blocks in various directions from City Hall, the South Park Blocks, the Portland Art Museum, Portland State University and a bevy of restaurants to explore with his girlfriend, Kristina Burns.

The 35-year-old Jünker, who operates his own design and construction firm, also realized the Portland Plaza condos offered a unique amenity in the age of lofts: actual bedrooms. "I'd looked at every condo in downtown Portland, the Pearl, South Waterfront, Irvington," he recalls. "I lost count after a while. Through that process the value of this structure became more apparent. It had been



The master bedroom is the sleekest space in the home, like *2001: A Space Odyssey* if the spaceship were made out of hardwoods. Closet doors (illuminated with glass panels) and an entertainment center are seamlessly incorporated into the walnut wall system.



The master bed, illuminated from below, seems to float. Its wood platform is connected to built-in side tables. The wall behind is comprised of glass tiles. Mike Rice is a cat that's everywhere.



In the guest bathroom, Tunisian marble floors and a floating walnut vanity give way to a limestone shower.

very difficult at the time to find true two-bedroom two-bath condos that weren't ridiculously priced. The condition of this unit was pretty awful, including seashell-shaped fake marble sinks, particleboard, and popcorn ceilings. But that also excited me. It was a vehicle for my design, but with a timeless design pedigree."

A recent visit to his condo is telling in how he melds work and play. Jünker is sitting on a kitchen barstool, coffee in hand and his cat, Mike Rice (named for the Blazers commentator), at his feet. He is contemplating an in-progress design projected on his TV. In the background, through floor-to-ceiling glass, is a panoramic view of the downtown skyline and the West Hills. "I put the design onscreen, drink coffee and look out the window," he says. "The view gives me a sense of perspective and contemplation about how it all fits together. A lot of times between design, architecture and construction professionals, things can become lost in translation. If the ideas originate from me and the client, I know exactly how I'm going to apply those ideas when I start building."

"He has so many talents wrapped into one individual," says Barbara Anderson, a fellow Portland Plaza resident whose condo Jünker redesigned and remodeled. "He goes down to teeny tiny details with his design; everything is perfect down to an eighth of an inch. Yet in dealing with us he's very sensitive. He became a dear friend."

Jünker's own condo has a kind of warm minimalism achieved through a few simple design choices, particularly the marriage of walnut and concrete. "There's a lot of texture here, and plenty of stuff to look at out the window," he says. "Just having something calm inside seems to work. So it's designed so that you don't need a lot of stuff. Somebody could really move in with a couch and a couple of chairs and be done." Yet because of the nominal décor, a few simple pieces stand

out. In the living room, for example, Jünker has displayed a stand-up acoustic bass from his musician days; it's not only beautiful but seems to symbolize his approach to artful construction.

His condo, like all in the Portland Plaza, is shaped like a pie wedge, with the building's curving glass façade wrapping the living room, office and master bedroom. Jünker's biggest design move was simply to open things up: removing a wall separating the kitchen from the living room, and creating new openings from the second bedroom into the bathroom and the kitchen. "It created a circular flow," he explains. "A lot more light flows in now. Plus I love to have people over for food and drinks. Now the kitchen is really at the center."

The master suite, more disco-like in feel, is Jünker's favorite part of the condo. The centerpiece is a custom-made captain's bed with floating side tables and lighting mounted underneath. The bed looks out at a walnut-draped closet system with a built-in entertainment center. "It just kind of came together more succinctly than anything else," he says. "It's just a combination of that big monster walnut bed and the full wall of walnut. You're encased in that box of wood."

As he has come to know fellow Portland Plaza residents and become involved with efforts to remodel its public spaces, Jünker also discovered the building's population is more diverse than most Pearl or South Waterfront condos. There are retired doctors and lawyers living quietly here. At the same time, legend has it that former Trail Blazers players living here used to

hold wild hot-tub parties in the basement spa. Jünker represents a new generation moving in, eager to connect with the past but also to make it his own. "I just created something that made me happy," he says. "I didn't have to design for anybody else. This was a chance that I had to show myself and show my future clients what a place would look like if I had control. It's 100 percent Fritz." **oh**



ABOVE: A pull-down Murphy bed can quickly transform Jünker's office to a guest room.

RIGHT: The office, just off the kitchen, looks out at the downtown skyline. The Pronghorn antelope's head (purchased at a shop on North Mississippi Avenue) brings a whimsical, rustic touch to a sleek, modern office.

## WRAPPED *in wood*

The entrance and back hallway leading to the master suite comprise the one area largely untouched by windows and natural light. Here Jünker wrapped the walls in walnut, using its natural texture as juxtaposition against the panorama of the view. "I just ended up creating a wooden tunnel, something I wanted to walk through," he says. "You're close to all the surfaces, so you really see the grains of the wood."

In addition to the walnut cabinetry, Jünker installed Scandinavian white oak hardwood floors, selecting an extra wide plank to emphasize the sense of flow from the glassy great room into the more intimate private spaces. But it's walnut that is the star, evident in built-in cabinetry and closets throughout.

"I consciously made an effort to draw from the era of the building's construction.

For me that meant walnut paneling," he adds. "I grew up in Iowa and was around it a lot and loved the material. Its simple, elegant, flowing patterning can lighten considerably when exposed to air and light." He says the ensuing medium brown wood tone provides an ideal contrast to lighter floors.

Jünker used boiled linseed oil and two topcoats of satin water-based lacquer to get the desired look. "The linseed oil technique yields incredible golden depth to the grain, but can be a very challenging method to execute," he says. "You have to hand-rub the oil on, and then it has to dry for one week or more. But there is no more beautiful treatment for walnut, and it is worth the extra time. Other methods just cannot bring out the depth like the boiled linseed oil can."

