

Houston Designer Face-Off

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Ann Wolf and Margaret Naeve

The municipal HQ of the largest city in Texas is also one of the country's most notable examples of Art Deco design. Conceived by architect Joseph Finger in 1939 as part of the New Deal, Houston City Hall has a majestic marbled lobby with a ceiling mural, grillwork made of bronze and nickel, and walnut-paneled city council chambers that look like they were ripped out of a *Thin Man* movie. But the historic details are lost on most Houstonians, who don't have a reason to swing by the historic building. To change perceptions, AD PRO asked two local designers for their ideas about how to make the structure a destination in its own right.



Houston City Hall

Photo: Getty Images

Ann Wolf, Ann Wolf Interior Decoration:

I think it could benefit from a very deep cleaning. Never underestimate the value of maintenance, of polishing the limestone and giving a great shine to all those gorgeous metals. Our city has torn down so many of the early buildings; we have to be very mindful of preserving what's good. There is so little in the city that has this [historic](#) scale. Downtown kind of empties out at night. I think it would be amazing to put a restaurant in City Hall, so after the government workers go home, the building could have another life. I would hire some of the best classical architects in Houston—there's a firm called Curtis & Windham—to construct an Art Deco-inspired [restaurant](#). It could be a farm-to-table restaurant, using all Texas-native ingredients, locally grown. In that central hallway, you could put giant palm trees to bring a little life to it—maybe add a coffee shop. I would create a reason for people to go in and enjoy the architecture.

Margaret Naeve, M. Naeve:

My design aesthetic is a mix of old and new. I've been lucky to work on historical homes in Houston, and you have to be mindful. You don't want to mess up the integrity of this grand building. In the lobby, I would add some classic but contemporary furniture: Curvy sofas, to play off the medallion on the floor, would really soften the space. Some Pierre Augustin Rose coffee tables would be so chic; they're natural-looking with white resin on the top. I'm such a fan of Apparatus lighting; I could see a massive installation of their lariats. They create movement. And you could mix that with some classic Art Deco pieces. We've been buying a lot of Andreotti round pedestal tables, which are selling like hotcakes. Those are '60s and '70s, but the feeling is natural. They would add another organic element. We're seeing so much travertine these days, which I love. I like the warmth of it. I could see a travertine desk as a greeting point. That would be beautiful.
