

William Haines  
designs



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## THE LEADING MAN

HOLLYWOOD STAR WILLIAM HAINES BRIGHTENED UP THE INTERIORS OF THE 1930s, CREATING A WHOLE NEW DEFINITION OF ELEGANCE. BY ERIN FEHER



"The only real freedom we have left is the home," William Haines once said. "Only there can we express anything we want." BELOW: Haines' 1953 Hostess chair, designed to allow conversations in any direction, has been reissued by L.A.'s Lindley Associates.

A popular actor of the silent screen, William "Billy" Haines' breakout role was as college student Tom Brown in *Brown of Harvard*. But the launch of his second career—the interior design work he is ultimately remembered for—came with the Cinderella-like transformation of his own home in 1927. With the help of architect James E. Dolena, Haines converted the dreary Spanish-style residence into a sunny Georgian Colonial, combining elaborate moldings with dramatic Art Deco murals. Haines boldly mixed antiques of various periods with modern pieces and bright colors—setting the standard for the style known today as "Hollywood Regency."

Born in Virginia at the turn of the century, Haines moved to Hollywood in 1922 after winning Samuel Goldwyn's "New Faces" contest. He quickly made a name for himself in films such as *The Midnight Express* and *Slide Kelly Slide*. In 1930, while still under contract with MGM, Haines garnered so much attention for his glamorous home that he was inspired to open an antique shop stocking his personal finds. The openly gay actor refused to enter into a sham marriage and lived with partner Jimmie Shields until his death in 1973. His contract with MGM came to an end in 1933, forcing him to explore other careers.

As a designer, Haines worked with a high-profile cast, including his good friend and actress Joan Crawford and director George Cukor. "He had access to Hollywood talent that was available nowhere else—set designers, furniture makers, lighting experts—so he could get absolutely anything he wanted," recalls Peter Schifando of Lindley Associates, who maintains an archive of more than 2,000 of Haines' designs. Whether it was a custom fringed settee for Crawford or hand-painted wallpaper panels for Constance Bennett, Haines' one-of-a-kind designs were the ultimate set for Hollywood at home. ■

