

This Historic Train Car Was Transformed Into an ArtDeco Dream for a Family of Railway Enthusiasts

Rodgers drew inspiration from a trip on the famed Orient Express to ensure this car would be fit for the modern *bon vivant*.

BY [LAUREN WICKS](#) PUBLISHED: OCT 26, 2022



Scottsdale, Arizona-based designer Wendy Rodgers had been working with Rob Menzies, a railway owner and private railcar enthusiast, for years on both residential and railcar projects before landing her biggest challenge yet. Menzies presented Rodgers with a third railcar project: a 1954 Union Pacific vessel originally built as an observation bar and lounge car that he envisioned as his next luxurious home on the rails. The problem was, the car had been completely stripped down. Rodgers says that the car was practically nothing inside but steel, and though she knew she had her work cut out for her, the designer couldn't wait to give this project a new life.

"Rob really gave me the confidence to do something as unique as a railcar the first time and by this project, I knew the ins and outs, so I felt I could take it on even though it was completely stripped," says Rodgers. "There was a staircase in the center but there were no floorboards or anything. I was starting entirely from the basics."

Though the railcar had been built in the mid-20th century, Rodgers felt that the car's sleek lines lended best to the Art Deco era and sourced inspiration from a trip on the famed Orient Express from Paris to Venice, which she says is the ultimate example of Art Deco railcar design. She also quickly realized that nearly every piece of furniture would have to be designed custom, as the railcar measured 90' x 10' and every item needed to be able to withstand speeds up to 90 miles per hour when in transit.

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"I started thinking about the project like designing a yacht because they are done similarly where every inch counts and all drawers need to have pneumatic closures so they don't get thrown open," says Rodgers. "I kept looking to that industry for details to make the most of the

space I could." This is also fitting considering that Rodgers says these high-design private railcars are often referred to as "land yachts" by their owners.



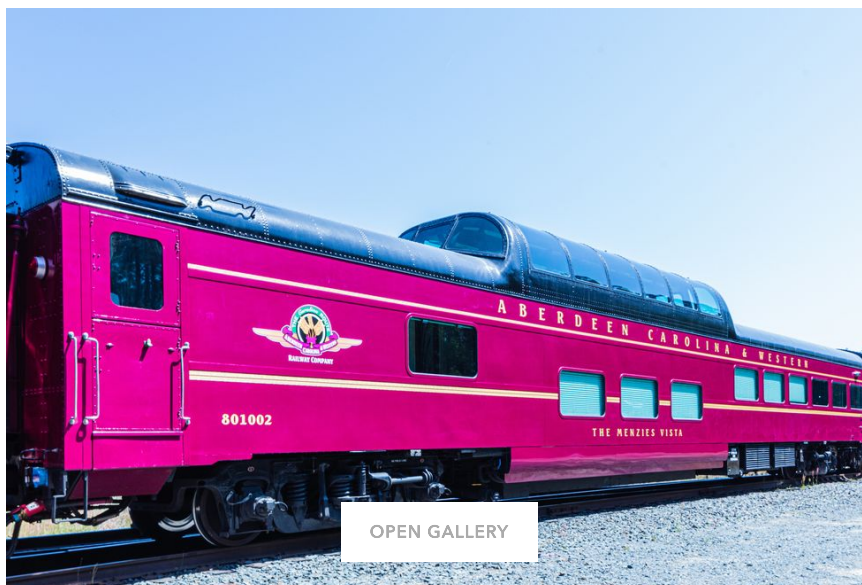
The Art Deco-inspired bar features stunning custom glass work and a Maya Romanoff veneer maple wood wallpaper.

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Incredibly, Rodgers was able to create a layout that included four bedrooms, four bathrooms, a kitchen, laundry room, bar, and dining area that could comfortably fit Menzies' family or other guests. This generous floor plan was able to be so comprehensive due to the designer's brilliant custom furniture pieces, nearly all of which serve multiple purposes, to ensure this tiny space would have all the amenities and creature comforts of home while feeling like a luxury hotel.

"This project helped me think more three-dimensionally as I had to be incredibly efficient," says Rodgers. "You don't realize how every half an inch counts when you're used to residential and commercial projects. The closets are seven inches wide, so you have to live differently here, and we had to find a place for suitcases and even decorative pillow storage in every room to maximize space."

Art Deco Rail Car Tour



Menzies is known for his punchy magenta-painted railcars.

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Rodgers also loved the challenge of creating custom pieces that had to be more than just pretty faces. Every item needed not only to offer some kind of storage but also be sturdy enough to handle trips across the country at top speeds. She even needed to source the right kind of paint that would be able to stand up to luggage and furniture banging up against the narrow 28-inch hallways. However, all these restraints didn't keep Rodgers from going all out with color and stunning materials, such as the interior doors that were designed with walnut burl wood and brass inlay and the countertops created with special slabs of quartzite. However, her favorite piece is the colorful backlit glass in the bar that feels like it was created at the peak of the Art Deco movement.

"It's always fun when a client won't settle for the average and wants to source rare materials," Rodgers says. "Once he committed to the style, Rob wanted to go all out with the Art Deco design and run with his love of color. He loves the rich tones and even the exterior of his private cars are painted magenta."

Between the top-to-bottom redesign and countless custom pieces needed to fill this small but mighty space, it's no surprise that this private railcar project took nearly four years to complete. Since then, this Art Deco darling has joined Amtrak trains up and down the East and West Coasts and has also ventured to Chicago, toting its owners in modern luxury with plenty of historic charm. Anyone still unconvinced that rail travel is experiencing a new golden age is sure to second guess that thought after a trip aboard this stunning vessel that puts any first class flight amenities to shame.

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Lauren Wicks is a Birmingham-based writer covering design trends, must-have products, travel inspiration, and entertaining. She's obsessed with globally inspired textiles, hosting dinner parties, and French cocktails.