

ARTIST PROFILE: Illustrator Christian Musselman

DRAWING INSPIRATION

Christian Musselman has fun. But don't mistake that for lacking professionalism—producing detailed custom home portraits is serious business. From children's toys to mid-century masterpieces, the Denver-based illustrator has crafted a lifelong dream into a successful career of serious play.

WORDS: Cory Phare

AS A CHILD, Christian Musselman was struck by the design of his grandparents' house: single-level, open floor plan, and with expansive windows—informed by function and celebrating the life inside. It's an image that can be seen in the custom residential illustrations he conjures through Christian Musselman Illustrations, catalyzing the imagination with their detailed simplicity. It makes sense, given that they serve as continuance of Musselman's life's work—as someone who has "...wanted to be an illustrator ever since he was a kid." And fortunately for his clients, he brings a well-honed sense of wonder to each project.

After agency work as a storyboard artist and designer, Musselman evolved his illustration work into a full-time venture. That's what led to serious work from child's play; for the past decade, he has illustrated projects from Barbie books to Hot Wheels packaging. "It's been a great gig; I love the energy and crazy color palette used in the toy business," said Musselman. "It's fun to see the artwork on the shelves."

So how does one get from toys to terrazzo? By taking a walk. An appreciator of the architectural abundance back in his hometown of Chicago, Musselman—after a brief stint in Santa Fe—began finding inspiration within Denver's own creative cache on display. "Walking around Arapahoe Acres, I was inspired to try channeling my thinking and creativity in a new way," he said. "It sparked me, these big pieces of livable artwork on the streets."

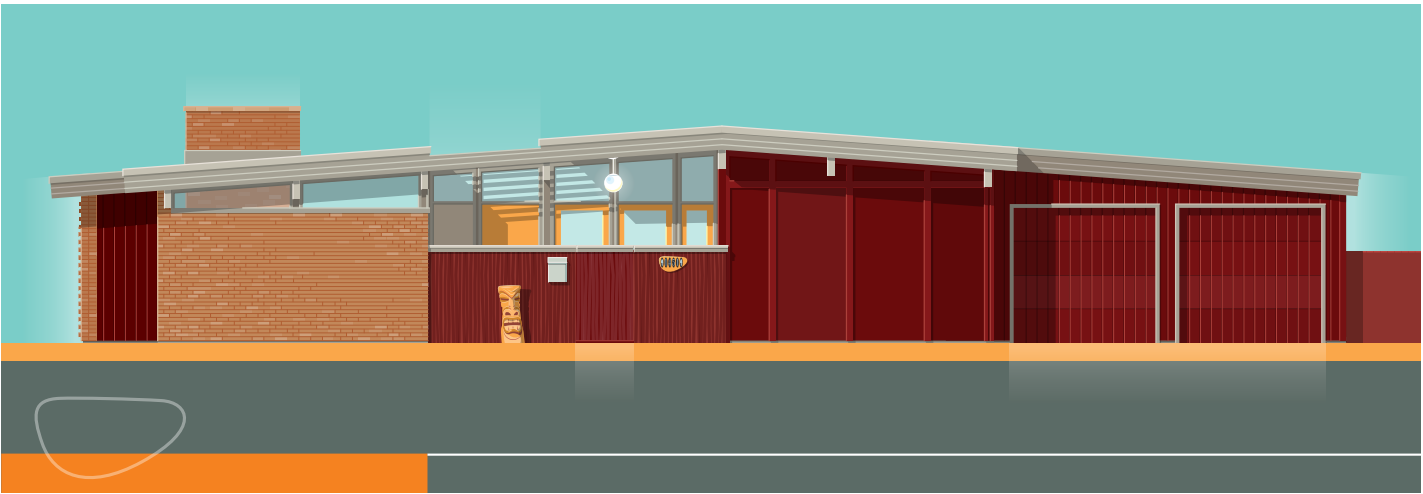
Excursions to Palm Springs only added fuel to that creative fire. "You can't go there and not become a house nut!" he said. Drawn to mid-century's inherent optimism, one thing he noted was

the ability of Modernism to imbue minimalism with vitality. "How much can you take away and still have incredible flair?" he said. "Someone had a vision of what it meant to live in this present moment, with an eye to the future."

Translating that vision to an illustration requires not just incredible attention to detail, but a process both creative and conducive to collaboration with far-flung constituents across the country. Musselman begins his projects by having clients take first-round reference photographs, and he uses those to diagram 10 to 15 further detailed shots. Then, in Adobe Illustrator, he blocks in larger elements before adding doors, windows, trim, and down to the finest details, all the while in consort with the homeowners to ensure the vision they're working toward together. And those colors that made illustrating toys so engaging? Musselman finds the same fun from finagling modern accents into muted background elements.

This discovery process is at the core of Musselman's illustrations. When you study them, you begin to notice details that you didn't initially—similar to the homeowners' discovery while traipsing through their hedges to get the best photograph. The result is a refined playfulness, using detail to honor the shared vision of artist, architect, and resident. "It's fun to play with and stylize illustrations, but the niche is giving people accurate graphic representations of their homes," said Musselman. "If that means counting individual bricks between windows, then that's what I'll do to get it right for them."

See more of his work at christianmusselman.com.



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