

# Metropolitan Design Secrets Home

For Every  
Room in  
the House

A Spectacular  
Modern  
Lake House

*Exclusive:*  
Our Interview  
with Giorgio  
Armani

Breathing  
new life in  
a Chicago  
co-op, p.104



## A View to the Future

Architect Dirk Denison and designer Michael Richman give a **Chicago** art collector's historically significant Beaux Arts co-op a modern twist to match its owner's new life.

**T**he craving for killer views has inspired many homeowners to forsake their ground-based abodes for something that shows a little sky. When Chicago businessman Michael Alper decided to trade in his 1894 Gold Coast megahouse for a lakeside flat, he wanted the most dazzling vista to be the one from his home office, because, he reasoned, "that's where I spend most of my time."

Moving also marked a new chapter in his life. After he and his wife, Pamela, finished an astonishing historic restoration of their 25,000-square-foot home and filled it with Biedermeier antiques and contemporary art she passed away. Eventually, Alper observes, "I was ready for something very different: someplace open, airy and much more modern, filled with comfortable furniture."

Alper scooped up a handsome Streeterville co-op overlooking Lake Michigan. The building had been designed by society architect and developer Benjamin Marshall in 1925. Back then, it was considered the city's premiere residence. Today, its cachet is intact. But a previous owner's gut job had "stripped the unit of so much character for Alper's liking," explains Chicago architect Dirk Denison, whom Alper hired to revitalize the austere flat.

In the living room, designer Michael Richman chose elegant but purposely mismatched midcentury pieces—a pair of Andre Sormay armchairs, a Patricia & Kathleen leather sofa and a Warren McArthur lounge newly covered in orange cotton—and added his own: a Rayne-inspired white plush Over Easy chair and Loren coffee table. Large-scale art pieces, here left, are by Matthew Ritchie, Adam Fava (in the library) and Thomas Struth.

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**T**he renovation was a delicate balancing act, says architect Denison, who had to preserve the building's historic character while updating it for modern living. "The goal was to create a space that felt like a classic New York City apartment, but with all the amenities of a modern one," he says.

he renovated apartment is deceptively simple, given the demands of the project. Alper was coming from a much larger home and owned a lot of furniture and art, including large-scale pieces that were taller and wider than most of the apartment walls. Then there was the issue of the horse office, which he was determined to locate in what should have been the dining room, because it had the best views. Making the space work for his lifestyle and art was one monumental endeavor, while helping him figure out what to keep and where it would go was another. Denison focused on the former, while Alper's significant other, Sotheby's Midwest chairman Helyn Goldenberg, helped his first designer Michael Richman—a self-described "die-hard modernist," who is locally acclaimed for his clean-lined work—thought it would be effective to give the apartment new architectural vigor by "returning the

rooms to their richly detailed neoclassical roots, then updating them with targeted contemporary interventions." Goldenberg, who also lives in the building, helped with the first part of the plan, since moldings and millwork in her apartment were intact. Denison copied her originals to detail Alper's rooms anew. He also executed mancovers the original builder couldn't have imagined would ever be necessary: first, raising the door frames as high as the lowering windows. Then he installed a sleek, floating glass-and-oxyc fireplace screen suspended on a lean stainless steel frame over half the living room wall.

This page in the living room, two Thomas Struth photos (dark-a modernist, taller door (see Andrew Gursky photo, center) is in the adjacent office). Opposite: Clockwise from upper left: The view from the bar to the gallery shows a Richard Aitichewager chair and a Gursky print; Richman (left), Denison (standing) and project architect Patrick Pappas in front of the glass fireplace; Richman's custom-Maggy Bear sofa in the library; the classic Beaux-Arts exterior.





Originally, Alper planned to cull most of the furniture for the apartment from his previous home. He owned plenty of pieces perfectly suited to the classical lines of the new apartment. But as work progressed, Denison added more contemporary flourishes. The already roony foyer connecting the front and back areas of the house was expanded to become a 60-foot-long gallery to hold large art, and the former maid's room was transformed into a bar. White walls were replaced by Brazilian gamswood panels and grating, gleaming glass display cabinets. Soon it became clear that "almost all of the owner's furniture was too formal for the updated architecture," explains Richman, "so it went to Sotheby's."

Then began a quest that occupied both clients and designers. Denison accompanied Alper and Goldenberg to Art Basel Miami, where the trio bagged to obtain the last available chair by American pop artist Richard Artschwager. When Goldenberg and

Denison convinced Alper to make his office a double-duty space, just in case he wanted to entertain there, they snapp'd up a dozen midcentury stacking chairs in Belgium. On trips to New York with Richman, they found more midcentury pieces, including a pair of Andre Sormay armchairs and a Silvio Cavatorta desk. Goldenberg pulled in the quirky Warren McArthur chair in the bar from a dealer who specializes in the designer's work. And after securing stores worldwide, Richman found the perfect vintage Danish sofa to use the living room—a steel and leather number by Fabricius & Kastholm—at Andrew Hollingsworth in Chicago.

This page: The glass-topped conference table in the office is built on a base by sculptor Gene Summers; it can do double duty as a dining table (although Alper prefers to dine out). He has a total of 12 dining chairs, which can be stacked for compact storage. A series of 24 large-scale photographs by Gae Bolp represents the four seasons; Alper shows six at a time in the room. Opposite: The kitchen was refurbished rather than replaced (see "What the Pros Know").



### What the Pros Know

Alper did not like the open-house's recently installed kitchen, but it seemed essential to go it. The new white, six-foot-long stainless-steel kitchen was "too glaring, antiseptic and nondescript for Alper's aesthetic," explains architect Dirk Denison; "so we found it done with cosmetic changes to make it a smart, serene side of business." Denison's handy list of pros to look for regarding the super-glamy interiors included and diverse fronts with warm, white-painted wood and leveling cabinets

over the sink into open floating shelves for dishes that could give the room bits of color. He also included modern-looking stainless steel in a hood and backsplash (not in each appliance as the Wolf stove and Sub-Zero refrigerator). He replaced an ice-chiller machine island top with rich Birch Beauty granite, and he upgraded the recessed lights to higher-quality, energy-efficient aluminum-equipped lighting. "The result," Denison continues, "was about 30 percent of a complete makeover."





**I**nstalling Alber's possessions was as labor-intensive as accumulating them. "Some of the artworks were so gigantic that they had to be hoisted in through the front window; so it was critical to hang them in the right spot the first time around," points out Denison. He created a complete set of elevations for the apartment, reducing photos of every piece to scale and popping them into place on the drawings. Stating the art went flawlessly—save for one piece: At ten feet four, Gandy's image of the Shanghai Grand Hyatt was two inches taller than the wall trim, so, rather than cutting the trim, a crew leaned it at an angle to gain extra inches.

Despite the team's enthusiastic treasure hunt, there were still a few spots to flush out after everything arrived. Richman filled them in with ingenious pieces of his own design. In the living room, his playful *Over Easy* chair, inspired by Jean Raybre's *Gauf* and covered in downy white shearing and worsted wool, "mixed

things up and added humor," says Richman, while his glass and steel *Luxem* table pulled together the other pieces and materials in the room. In the bedroom, rosewood nightstands based on an Andre Soreay design bridge a decorative gap between the vintage Italian desk and new custom-made bed.

Today, Alger's revamped home is fully flushed out, and all the rooms are comfortably furnished. But they're far from filled. "It's not done yet and may never be," confides Goldenberg. "Every place you live should be a work in progress." ❧

See *Renovators*, last pages.

This page: A vintage Italian desk by Silvio Cavalleria inspired designer Michael Richman's custom-designed nightstands and upholstered bed in the master suite. Opposite: In the master bathroom, Marcel Wanders's sculptural Gobi tub stands on its own on a platform of Adlon marble. The glass-encased shower, seats big enough for two, is clad in the same marble and sports a handy shaving sink. The window to the fire escape is translucent glass.

