



In the living room, an arching floor lamp provides reading light for the sectional sofa, and a custom ottoman, tucked under Ultra Modern's glass and steel table, slips out for extra seating. Opposite: A built-in console gives a tight space the feeling of a grand foyer.

No Small Plans

Shrewd use of space—and a big dose of style—give a high-rise pied-à-terre a whole new personality

BY LISA CREGAN /// PHOTOGRAPHY BY BOB COSCARELLI

What do you do when your views go on for miles but your place suffers from a serious lack of acreage? Designer **James Dolenc** of James Thomas, a Chicago interiors firm, has the answer. He recently rehabbed a 780-square-foot condo in a 1960s-era Lincoln Park high-rise for Phil Stillitano, a finance executive who works mostly in Asia these days. Stillitano alights in the one-bedroom pied-à-terre only four or five times a year, but he loves Chicago too much to give it up. “From my windows, I see a beautiful park, a beautiful city, and a beautiful lake; it’s the ultimate luxury,” he says. “I wanted the interiors to be as ‘wow’ as the view.”

Design-wise, they were starting nearly from scratch. Dolenc reports that the space was “a vanilla box. It had zero personality.” He went on to create an interior that’s spectacular by day, seductive by night, and still unfussy enough for a globetrotting exec who just wants to turn the key, kick back, and instantly chill. Here’s how he did it:

Make a grand entrance

In place of the condo’s original sad little entry, Dolenc created a gallery wall for art display and then—here’s the trick—sank a built-in console into a wall just beyond the kitchen entrance and topped it with a large mirror to pull light into the space. “It’s five steps farther into the apartment than expected,” says Dolenc, “extending the entryway and giving the illusion of a grand foyer.”

Remember limestone

isn’t stone cold “It’s a fallacy that limestone is a cold material; it’s actually very warm,” says Dolenc, who sheathed the floors of the apartment in 24-inch-square limestone tiles. “It feels like linen and it’s soft on the eyes.” Dolenc especially likes the way the limestone’s pale color bounces light into the darkest corners of the apartment.



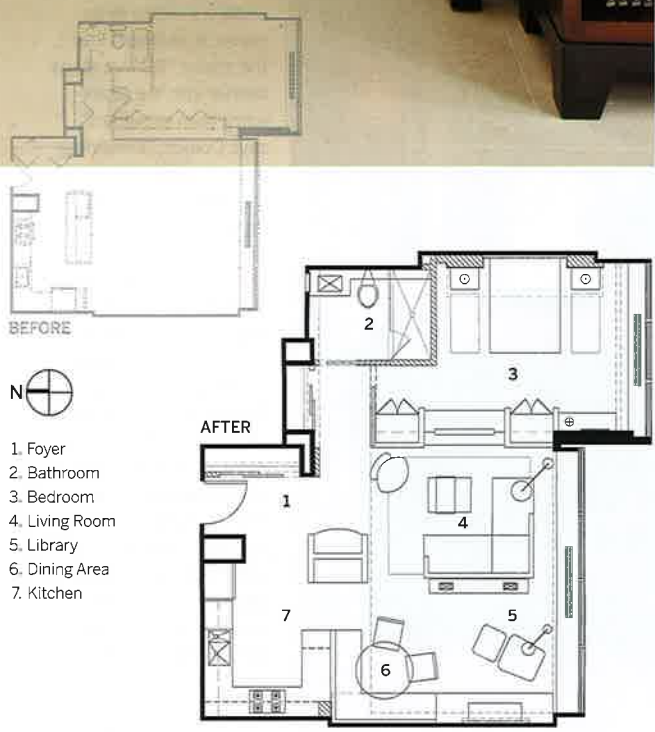
A sapelli wood wall in the living room incorporates a full closet that's accessed from the other side; cutouts pull light into the bedroom. Right: A ventless firebox and an Eames chair make an instant reading nook.



Play peekaboo with your rooms Dolenc designed an L-shaped windows into the interior cabinet wall that divides the living room from the bedroom. "They elongate the sightlines," says Dolenc, explaining that those cutouts really help the bedroom spill out into the living room. "Being able to see into the next space here feels so good," says Dolenc. Stillitano agrees: "Those windows really help make the place feel open and airy."

Carve out a library (with fireplace) "You've got your Eames lounge and ottoman, your Orbiter standing lamp, and your fireplace," says Dolenc. "Instant reading nook! What else could you want?" He used an eco-friendly ventless firebox ("Who would think of having a fireplace in a high-rise?" asks Stillitano. "It adds such nice atmosphere."), then positioned a long custom console to do double duty—holding a pair of Lucite lamps for lighting behind the sectional sofa while also acting as a bookshelf. Another smart touch: The lounge swivels so Stillitano can turn it completely around to contemplate his panoramic view.

Thou shalt not obstruct circulation There are no traditional hinged doors in this apartment. Closet doors slide open and the bedroom and bathroom are closed off by pocket doors with frosted glass. "In an apartment this small," says Dolenc, "a door is just a roadblock."



- 1. Foyer
- 2. Bathroom
- 3. Bedroom
- 4. Living Room
- 5. Library
- 6. Dining Area
- 7. Kitchen



"The kitchen is defined by a long line of millwork that feels like furniture," says Dolenc. Walker Zanger glass tile extends to the soffit to give the illusion of height. Below: A banquette frees up floor space and a built-in pantry behind polished wood double-doors provides storage.



There's a reason hot nightclubs love banquettes

When square footage is at a premium, a built-in banquette makes a lot more sense than a gaggle of space-guzzling dining chairs. From this plush, mohair-upholstered perch, Stillitano can watch TV or host a cozy dinner party. At bigger get-togethers, it provides comfortable extra seating for guests when the sofa is full.

Give the kitchen a starring role "Since it's so open, the kitchen had to be drop-dead gorgeous, like a beautiful piece of antique furniture," says Dolenc. Glistening backsplashes of glass tile installed in a brick pattern draw the eye around the space with their horizontal lines and pull in much-needed natural light. Dolenc says he treated the stove hood as sculpture by leaving out upper cabinets on either side. "Now when you're sitting at the banquette you don't feel crowded at all," he points out. Stillitano agrees ("It had way too much stuff crammed in there originally"). The back of the banquette is higher than the granite counter, hiding any kitchen mess from the living area.



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The bedroom millwork is sapelli wood, the same material used in the kitchen and living area. Dolenc dressed the bed in creams, mochas, and brown tones "to keep it calm, so it recedes a bit."

Enjoy the suite life In the bedroom, where space was especially tight, Dolenc designed a huge custom tufted-leather headboard and wall-mounted bedside tables with matching leather-front drawers. "It's the way it would be done in a very special, luxurious hotel suite," he notes. Instead of sconces or table lamps, pendant lights hang from a millwork panel overhead. "The whole thing brings your eye up," Dolenc says. "Sixties condo ceilings are not as high as I'd like them to be." In the bathroom, eliminating the white elephant—the tub that sits unused in so many bathrooms—freed up floor space for a generous shower. "It's a nice big double-size shower now," says Stillitano. "So wonderful!"