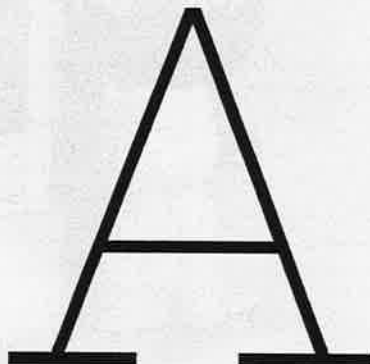


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HOME



bit of work”

is a legendary expression in the home design world, where renovations get bigger and timelines get longer with the same certainty that the sun rises and sets. Those were the very words Stephen Honeyball used with his design team, James Dolenc and Thomas Riker of Jamestomas, when he took them to see a unit he was considering buying on the 24th floor of a steel-and-glass, decade-old River North condominium tower.

“We all thought it could be amazing with a bit of work,” Honeyball says, chuckling in retrospect. The developer had finished the 4,000-square-foot apartment, which was edged with 2,000 square feet of terraces, for his own family of four and had loaded it with luxurious, traditional features. There were separate living and dining rooms for formal entertaining; exotic wood built-ins for elegant, out-of-sight storage; and a high-gloss Mick de Giulio kitchen.

Yet most of the amenities were major drawbacks for Honeyball, 33, a bachelor. “I wanted a place that would be open and lofty with a mix of raw elements but still clean and polished. And I needed big, open walls for art,” says the London transplant, a commodities trader who collects art.

Only the apartment’s dark concrete floors and kitchen, oozing with bold, brawny glamour from its gleaming stainless steel and lacquer, captured his aesthetic.

There was a lot of space to rework — including the terraces, which required planning and planting.

It was also a learning process for Honeyball, whose

art collection includes edgy, graphic, color-saturated pieces. “I’ve always been interested in fashion and design, but doing this place let me explore what I really wanted to live with,” he says.

When he met with Dolenc and Riker, “he had a whole scrapbook of clippings to show us of things he liked, filled with bright, fun, modern places with a lot of pop,” Riker says. “But he tended toward wide open spaces and clean-lined, iconic pieces, and liked the color to come in these wild, intense little bursts.”

With a transformation and his taste in mind, the designers removed all the millwork (which the developer was able to recycle in his new Bucktown home) and eliminated walls in the living area. They also reconfigured the entry hall, where the elevators opened right into the home. Once they stripped the drywall off the elevator shaft, they found a welcome surprise. “Concrete walls,” laughs Riker. “Needless to say, we left them exposed.” The newly naked walls were lacquered white, and the dark concrete floor got a lighter, glossier new hue — tasks that were easier said than done.

“Flawless walls are notoriously difficult to execute when there are no moldings or cornices to edge them,” explains Michael Mariottini, the Itasca-based contractor who did the job. Perfection can also be antiseptic, so they added Fry Reglet trim 6 inches off the floor instead of baseboard molding, achieving minimal but needed architectural definition.

Turning the concrete floors from deadening charcoal to shimmering pigeon gray was even trickier, since the dark stain had been mixed into the aggregate when the floor was laid. A resin overlay worked, “but it was an extremely challenging process,” says Mariottini.

Their creation: a pristine, 30-foot-long, lofty living area on one side of the apartment and a series of three more traditionally configured rooms on the other. The dramatically landscaped terraces, with gardens done by Chicago Specialty Gardens, are filled with hedges and trees to approximate bona fide grounds.

Each space called for its own furnishing game plan. Dolenc and Riker dreamed up a 15-foot, double-S-curved sofa clad in gray and cream wool flannel to snake through the long, lofty living area and temper its rigorously rectilinear lines. Playing to each curve are high-power elements such as Arne Jacobsen’s Swan and Egg chairs, in lime green and hot pink, respectively, and a velvety purple Hokanson rug splashed with lavender flowers.

The dining and office areas got super-streamlined furnishings paired with eye-grabbing lighting and plush rugs. To get the right balance in the dining area, the designers layered three hides on top of one another. In the office, desk and chairs are sized to do double duty as a second dining space if needed.

In the library, the design team played to age-old British tradition with some new-age twists. “True to his roots, Stephen asked for a modern take on an English gentleman’s study,” says Dolenc. Maya Romanoff’s Ajiro veneer wallpaper stands in for iconic paneling and a charred, Maarten Baas Smoke chair represents the wing chair.

Almost a year after Honeyball’s initial assessment, the transformation was complete. But it may not stay that way forever. “I love it, but it’s a bit big for one person,” concedes Honeyball. ■



Clockwise from top left: Honeyball's ever-growing collection of art includes an etheral James Welling photograph in the dining room. An eye-popping Peter Zimmerman resin on canvas painting hangs behind an Eames lounge and a stack of felt rocks. A photograph of musician Jeff Buckley is over his bed. More black and white photos grace Maya Romanoff's Ajiro bamboo veneer wallpaper, which stands in for paneling in the library.

Styling by Cynthia McCullough