

MODERN LUXURY

Interiors

CHICAGO

The Kitchen & Bath Issue

Divine Design:
Three Spectacular Local Abodes

The Eat Sheet! Fall Fare From a Top Chef

Trend Alert: Floating Cabinets,
Dramatic Faucets, Sophisticated Surfaces,
Cutting-Edge Tables and More!

PLUS:

THE MCA'S NEW INTERACTIVE INSTALLATION

A LOCAL MURAL ARTIST WAXES PERUVIAN

SOURCING TRIP: ANDERSONVILLE'S BEST BOUTIQUES





GROWING GAINS

As a renovation project grows in scope, so do the payoffs and perks.

By Lisa Skolnik | Photography by Tony Soluri
Portrait by Cynthia Lynn



The age-old adage “no pain, no gain” seems especially relevant to home renovations, known for the gut-wrenching distress they wreak yet the wonderful results they yield. That may help explain why “a dramatic renovation was never part of the plan when I bought this place,” says Chris Wall, the vice chairman of creative for North America Ogilvy & Mather, referring to his 2,000-square-foot Gold Coast duplex in a gloriously patrician 1925 Gothic Revival building. After gutting a massive 1840s Brooklyn townhouse in 2002, he’d been there, done that. So for his new Chicago home, he had a humbler game plan in mind: “I just wanted to take advantage of the 1920s architecture and make it comfortable and low maintenance,” he says.

“Famous last words in my world,” quips Chicago interior designer Lauren Coburn, who met Wall through a referral from his real estate broker, Andrea Farley. And secretly, she was leaning toward a large-scale project from the moment she saw the place. With architectural cachet oozing from every nook and cranny, “I literally gasped when I first walked in and realized its potential. So I

CLOSE TO HOME

Custom A. Rudin sofas swathed in Holly Hunt’s Great Plains linen are extra deep to accommodate the client’s height. The new marble inset incorporates the original limestone and showcases the iron A. Rudin fireplace screen. The black-and-white mixed-media artwork by Barbara Coburn, the designer’s mother, comes from Nancy Corzine. Above: interior designer Lauren Coburn poses next to the living room fireplace.

HEAVENLY STAIRWAY
A dazzling chandelier from Dessin Fournir adds a huge dose of glamour to the spare aesthetic in the living room, which is rounded out with A. Rudin armchairs, a Restoration Hardware console and a cut-to-measure Antrim carpet from Oscar Isberian. Flowers are by Virginia Wolff.





lobbied for a broader scope of work," she says.

As it turned out, a full-blown gut job was a necessity. "The mechanicals and electrical were dangerously outdated. It was like a fire waiting to happen," points out multitasking design-build contractor Scott Dresner, who Coburn brought in on the job. Both pros head eponymous firms and often team up on complicated jobs of this nature.

"Complicated was an understatement in this case," reflects Coburn. Besides obsolete systems, the apartment had crumbling walls, decaying floors and misguided interventions, such as obtrusive ductwork. The latter brought the second-story hallway down to 6.5 feet, yet "Chris is 6-foot-10, so he had to hunch over to even walk into the rooms on the second floor," she recalls.

Fortunately, Wall didn't need much convincing to forge ahead. "The more we looked at it, the more I realized that it needed to be a big job with new infrastructure and pretty much everything else," he admits. And fortunately, he had the funds. "I made a very low offer and, much to my surprise, they took it, so that left me enough to invest in a renovation."

Yet Wall's biggest contribution to the success of the project was his knowing mindset. "I'm a creative person myself and prefer to be given clear direction, but not micromanaged. So I tried to hold myself to that ethos on this job," he reasons.

With that caveat, Coburn and Dresner modernized all of the mechanicals; restored moldings, millwork and radiators; brought the original windows back to life; gutted bathrooms and the kitchen; replaced all the floors; installed a state-of-the-art lighting system; and raised the second-story hallway ceiling to its full height—luckily a full inch taller



SOFT SURROUNDINGS

In the master bath, sumptuous Calcutta Gold marble wraps around the custom Greenfield Cabinetry and sheathes walls for a luxurious demeanor.

Top: The A. Rudin dining room table and chairs are topped with a 1930s Murano glass chandelier from Vintage Pine and paired with mirrors from MCM Fine Framing.



DESIGN DETAILS

TYPE

Condominium Duplex

LOCATION

Gold Coast

INTERIOR DESIGN

Lauren Coburn LLC

DESIGN/BUILD

Dresner Design

than Wall. In fact, “everything we did was geared to a tall man, from the showerheads to every counter,” says Coburn. “We even raised all the door frames on the second story.”

New floors were a hard sell at first. “Initially, Chris just wanted to redo parts of them, but once we got going, he realized that to make them look good, they all had to be changed,” says Coburn, who replaced the old-fashioned 2-inch-wide oak slats with 5-inch-wide rift-cut oak planks stained a custom shade of espresso. “My vision was to preserve the historical details, but imbue the space with a sleek, serene, modern sensibility,” she explains.

Each step of the way was an enormous undertaking—especially the kitchen, which came first because Wall made it clear that it’s the most important space for his lifestyle. “No, I’m not a cook and don’t even entertain that much,” he laughs. “But I do most of my work at the kitchen counter. It’s right near the food and such a comfortable place to work.” The success of the space—once a warren

of smaller chambers—is due to the designers’ acumen and vision. The team turned the layout into a trim, but hardworking, version of the venerated “great room,” with separate activity areas for kitchen prep, eating, office work and lounging. They also came up with an ingenious plan to create the illusion of a higher ceiling by strategically placing recessed can lighting throughout. And to garner the most light from a window tucked away in the corner of the room, Coburn and Dresner used only base cabinets and wrapped the over-counter shelving in stainless steel with handsome, thick-lipped edges. A sumptuous book-matched marble backsplash “kept growing until it enveloped the whole wall because it was so beautiful,” says Coburn. The layer of out-and-out opulence it laid also turned out a retreat-worthy room for Wall. “I spend most of my time there,” he acknowledges.

Another tough challenge was the soaring bank of two-story-tall windows in the living room. “The frames and hinges took almost a month to strip, chip, sand, fill and paint, and we had to be scrupulous about it. They’re so important for both their aesthetics and their environmental performance,” points out Dresner.

And the lighting was a veritable exercise in innovation, especially in the voluminous, exquisitely detailed living room, where the designing duo didn’t want to compromise the beauty and integrity of the architectural detailing. Dresner dreamed up an unconventional track system that hugs one wall of the room that’s equipped with chic, yet minimal, high-power spotlights that can throw light entirely across the 460-square-foot expanse. And Coburn convinced her client to acquiesce to a dazzling chandelier he thought was “not what I would pick, but strangely intriguing,” says Wall. “It’s six feet wide and took three installers to handle, but coupled with the track system, it gives the room a luminous glow that emphasizes the ceiling’s gorgeous millwork. And now, he loves it,” Coburn reports.

A few of the things the designers left in the place were the stair railing and the handsome wood and glass doors at the entry to each room, which had been added by the previous owner. “They played to the windows and were the only good thing he did, but we did need to refinish them to work with the floors,” says Dresner.

Coburn painted the entire space Benjamin Moore’s Super White, and skillfully furnished it with streamlined, yet carefully tailored, custom-made upholstery to play to Wall’s height and the room’s capacious dimensions. Textiles are shades of white; accent pieces are dark wood to reference the floors and doors; and accessories and lighting are all-out glam, such as a frothy crystal chandelier and gilt mirrors in the dining room.

Art is still on the way for some spaces, but a 6-foot-square painting above the fireplace—done by Coburn’s mother, a Detroit artist represented by Nancy Corzine—sets a minimal, but dramatic, tone for the burgeoning collection.

Today, Wall gives his new home glowing reviews. Not only did the design team realize all his goals, they outdid them. “I thought they could never surpass my Brooklyn townhouse, which is about four times this size,” he says. “But in fact, they did. This is the nicest place I’ve ever lived.” ■



TURNDOWN SERVICE

In the kitchen, dramatic ceiling coffers and stainless steel custom-made shelves up the glitz quotient of the handsome custom Greenfield Cabinetry and extra-tall A. Rudin stools covered in stain resistant Edelman leather. Opposite page: A bed from Century, upholstered in white leather, plays to the furnishings in the living and dining room, which are informed by the art-deco styling, yet still contemporary. An Interior Craft lamb throw is a kicky complement to the understated Mia Tavola bedding.