

INTERIORS[®]



ART IN DESIGN

SWEET HOME
Chicago

INTERIOR DESIGN: MARSHALL ERB
TEXT: ZLATA KOZUL NAUMOVSKI
PHOTOGRAPHY: AIMÉE MAZZENGA







As an interior designer, Marshall Erb gently pushes his clients out of their comfort zones. He applied the same approach when undergoing a gut renovation of a two-bedroom apartment in the Gold Coast neighborhood of Chicago for himself and his partner. The panoramic views and the wraparound windows appealed to him, as did the high ceilings and proximity to Michigan Avenue and Lake Michigan. But the outdated décor—carpeted floors, mint-condition harvest-gold kitchen appliances and antiquated electrical—did not.

The boutique high-rise building, designed by Reinheimer & Associates, the architectural firm that also designed Chicago's first luxury condominium high-rise, The Carlyle (as Hirschfeld, Pawlan & Reinheimer), had been completed in 1974, just in time before the architecture of the late '70s took over. "Apartments were still being made on a grander scale with high ceilings and bigger bathrooms," Erb notes.

Erb kept most of the walls intact, including an undulating segment between two sets of windows that initially gave him pause. Rather than square it off as many others had done in the building, he went with the flow. "The elegant curvature of the wall mirrors the curved corners of the exterior, and I wanted that architectural detail to be expressed inside as well," Erb says. Inspired by nature, he decided he'd treat the wall and adjacent windows with a swath of verdant drapery that snaked along the ceiling. "I'm sitting here one night with a glass of champagne looking at a flower arrangement on the piano and I thought, 'That's the perfect color green,'" Erb recalls. He found the ideal shade in a linen blend from Norbar Fabrics. "It's very bright during the day," he says. "At night it becomes subtle and almost an antique bronze color. Green is fun to use that way. It's happy and reminds you of being outside and connects you to the ground again." This from an interior designer whose previous abode paid homage to neutral. "My last home was very beige and white and all about textures," Erb says. "I wanted to push myself with this apartment. I told my partner I really feel like we need to do color. Everything is going maximalist and color."

Continuing to play with color, he upholstered a sofa in the living room in a dusty aqua velvet from Donghia that he once used on a client's project. He saved the swatch, vowing to introduce the textile into the design scheme of his own home. "It kind of made the room for me," he says. The designer not only covered the sofa in the graphic fabric but also paired it with a chair and ottoman in a daring marigold mohair velvet. An '80s steel contemporary coffee table with travertine top and side tables in exotic woods by William Switzer add to the vignette. "I love shiny, polished exotic woods," Erb says. To this elegant mix, he incorporated a pair of T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings armchairs covered in a white linen from Holly Hunt. Along one wall, a glass-topped console table with white resin ibex head bases joins artwork—by Picasso, Miro and Ellsworth Kelly, among others—hung salon style.

The entire ensemble is a perfect foil to the intricate boiserie on the living room walls. Erb coated them in a chalky, plaster-like finish, thinking they would look great as a background on his Zoom calls (they did). Underfoot in the combined living room and dining room, he installed parquet wood flooring in an oversize basket weave pattern. "I was going for a modern Milanese vibe," he says of the apartment. "Imagine if you downsized from a palazzo to a new building in Milan and brought all your favorite things with you to this modern space." He cited the architecture of Piero Portaluppi and his work at the Villa Necchi Campiglio featured in the movie *I Am Love* as inspiration. "The idea of distilling all of those luxurious details—rich materials like polished burlwood, marble, steel and travertine mixed with precious furnishings, avant-garde artworks and quotidian objects—into a contemporary urban footprint guided my choices and captured my imagination."

Even the galley kitchen, redone with matte lacquer and Macassar ebony cabinets by Eurocraft Cabinetry and terrazzo floor tiles from Ann Sacks, presented an opportunity to incorporate some special pieces. An antique breakfast table purchased through Leslie Hindman Auctioneers still elicits joy as he recalls how he was the only bidder to show interest in the piece. Set against a lacquered ebony wall panel that stores china and crystal, it is used nightly for dinner for two.

Drawing from a rich inventory of furnishings that came from two previous homes, a design office and a warehouse—"I had everything from Louis XV to Art Deco to midcentury with a little bit of modern thrown in," he says—he cherry-picked only the best for this apartment. When it came to color, Erb found he pushed himself with the same conviction he pushes his clients. "This apartment was kind of a laboratory for that experiment of 'Let's do bold color in a way that no one would call it garish.' I can show clients that you can have an aqua couch with marigold chair and green curtains and it works." ■ Marshall Erb, marshallerb.com



