

# CHANNELING MIES

A CLIENT AND ARCHITECT FOLLOW THE FOOTPRINT  
OF THE MASTER, AND LESS IS MORE AGAIN

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any architects pour their heart and soul into a project, only to hold their breath and pray that the client doesn't screw it up with the furniture.

"We make suggestions to them, offer to take them shopping or even beg them to heed our decorative advice," admits Chicago architect Carlos Martinez. "This

was definitely not one of those projects," he says of a sleek, architecturally savvy Streeterville co-op he created for a couple with four children.

In fact, the opposite was true. "[The wife] had already bought most of the furniture, and it was incredible stuff. Her taste is so refined and well-edited that I was bowled over the first time I met her. I just had to come up with something equally wonderful and significant to house it all," he says.

He had good raw materials, simpatico clients and impeccable experience for the job. The couple owned three contiguous one-bedroom apartments totaling 2,400 square feet in a Mies van der Rohe building. They were also interested in "respecting the design principles inherent in the Miesian aesthetic," explains the husband. Martinez had reshaped three apartments into his own home in a neighboring Mies van der Rohe building, so he had a clear idea of how to proceed with his clients' space.

"They were living in a collection of rooms that didn't relate to each other, or function well. And it was a bizarre layout. You had to walk through the middle of the kitchen to



BY LISA SKOLNIK

TRIBUNE PHOTOS BY NATHAN BECKNER



Slabs of travertine on the floor are sized and installed to create a grid that lines up with the mullions on the windows, while sleek aluminum casements over every window hide mesh screens for light and heat control.

In a nod to Mies van der Rohe's preferences, a marsh-oak wood kitchen system from Poggenpohl has counters that look like marble but are actually granite. Below: A sliding wood door allows the master suite to become a part of the living and dining area when open or a private retreat when closed. Opposite: Burnished flame drapes on gliding rollers are strategically situated in each room for color and intrigue, not shade.



get into the master bedroom," recalls Martinez. He developed a structural plan that put a master suite adjacent to a living and dining area in one wing of the apartment; a children's suite with two bedrooms and a study for the wife, a renowned writer, on the other side; and a kitchen between the two domains.

Martinez also imbued the program with materials and details that jibed with the clients' wishes to respect the spirit of the architecture, yet update it. Walls would feature steel-lined recesses at their bases and reveals at their crowns to give them the same weightless demeanor of the original Miesian design. Travertine, a material revered and often employed by Mies, would be used to clad the floors but cut into slabs half the width of the windows then installed on a grid to match the mullions.

The kitchen would be skirted by an arched wood-clad wall that would conceal the mechanicals and create a circulation path from the public zone to the children's wing, a concept that was a direct nod to the curved elements Mies included in many of his European residential projects, explains Martinez. The master suite would have an expansive sliding wood door that would allow it to become part of the living and dining area when open or a private retreat when closed. It would have wood floors for comfort and warmth, but they would be cut in slabs the same size as the marble tiles and installed to resemble parquet (by manipulating the grains) in deference to Mies' penchant for this pattern.

Before the couple could start the project, it had to be delayed due to family circumstances. When they revived it two years later, Martinez had become the design director at Gensler and couldn't devote the necessary time to the job. So he brought in Julie Fisher, his former student who now headed her own architecture firm, to act as the principal project designer.

Eight months later, the master plan Martinez had developed was realized, graced with new materials and features Fisher and the wife added once construction started. The millwork and cabinetry were fabricated out of a boldly striped Australian walnut that incorporated light and dark hues and unified the different wood tones in the palette. A marsh-oak wood kitchen system from Poggenpohl was matched with dark green countertops that looked like marble, a material Mies preferred, but were actually sturdy granite.

The layout and physical vocabulary of the space is both architecturally relevant to its roots and elegant, a perfect foil for the furniture. Martinez only has one qualm: whether the airy, shelf-lined study he designed for the wife is working out for her.

"It has this spectacular view of the lake, so if I sat there I'm sure I'd never get anything done. But she had a best-seller . . . so it must be OK," he reasons. □

*Lisa Skalnik writes frequently for the Magazine.*

**RESOURCES** Architecture—Carlos Martinez, Gensler, and Julie Fisher, Ic Studio Inc., Chicago; Contractor—Topline Construction, Chicago; Window screens and drapes—Joel Klaff Workshop, Chicago; travertine—Stone Works Inc., Schaumburg; wood floors—Peter Flooring Inc., Chicago; millwork—J & J Woodwork Furniture Inc., Bedford Park, Ill.; kitchen—Poggenpohl, Merchandise Mart, Chicago; artwork and furnishings—personal collection.



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