

APARTMENT LIFE: Smart Ideas for Small Spaces

Metropolitan Home

Fresh
Stylish
Inviting
Mellow
Warm
Personal
Eclectic
Liveable
Accessible
Green

Lamps
We Love
Color:
Fashion-
Forward
Neutrals

*Refined Elegance
in an Art-Lined South
Apartment, p.118*

ACTORS' EDITION
FROM THE
METROPOLITAN
MAGAZINE



Easy Modern

...designed to create an atmosphere of a Florida beach cottage
...contemporary sculpture. Furniture needs to be of good quality
...and these designers, along with a group that had a vision, in a
...of furniture needed a village of furniture that includes a chair
...for designers with a strong mid-century style. In 1960s &
...a lot of classic mid-century furniture by Jacques Chastot, a
...the 1950s lounge chair table and a side table by Mario Perini



Designed for

Art

Coordinating a collection
of contemporary art and vintage
mid-century furniture,
Miami designer Judi Male created
a singular penthouse that's
as much a home as a showcase.



Judi

Male, one of the two principals in Miami's Male-Cablin Design Partners, was at a dinner party one night when a guest mentioned that he and his wife had just bought a 1949 Vladimir Kagan *Separeira* sofa. Male, who had an avid interest in the period, knew the piece. Fortunately, her dinner companions were looking for a designer for the two-story penthouse they had just bought in a high-rise condominium that is located on a spectacular spot on the edge of Biscayne Bay with a view east to the Atlantic.

The Kagan sofa was just the beginning of the story for Male and her clients, whose interest in important contemporary furniture soon burgeoned into a passion for painting and sculpture. The result: a collection that now boasts pieces by Frank Stella, Robert Motherwell, Helen Frankenthaler and Sol LeWitt, among others.

Back in Michigan, the clients had traditional 18th- and 19th-century English and French furniture. When they first moved to Florida, to a townhouse in Miami, they progressed to European art

deco. But somehow a brand-new penthouse seemed to the empty-nesters a perfect venue for a switch to the contemporary—or, perhaps, the “vintage contemporary.”

With Male as their designated designer, the energetic clients began their quest, one that included trips through the annual Art Basel/Miami Beach exhibitions to look at both art and rare furniture. Further, the homeowners had Male poring through auction catalogs and studying photos of furniture to find just the right fit. “It was a wonderful learning experience for all of us,” says Male.

This page: A Helen Frankenthaler painting sets the tone in a seating area that features a psychedelic Pierre Paulin chair, a pair of Gino Pini chairs by Vladimir Kagan and a Maria Pergay coffee table; the sculpture on the floor is by Sol LeWitt. Opposite: The homeowners enjoy a bar designed by Inale; the custom bar stools are by Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz. Sculptures are by Anish Kapoor (hanging) and Michael Vasquez.

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Knowing

that the apartment itself needed to be spare. Male conceived an understated setting for furniture and art. "Really," she says, "I designed the background and tried to make the rooms an organic part of this blooming collection. For me, the basic idea was to hear what they wanted their home to be. I started with a blank slate." The goal, however, was not just to create a stage set for the artifacts but to do so in a way that made this a home, arranging comfortable seating areas both for entertaining and for quiet nights spent alone.

The couple began to build a solid collection of furniture: more Kagan, of course, and, joining him, pieces by such designers as Mira Nakashima, Pierre Paulin, Maio Pargay and Jacques Chastenet. Most of it, along with some of the major artworks, was bought at auction after considerable study and thought. "We never buy anything unless we both agree on it," says the wife.

To help with the job, Male assembled a team of consultants

including architect Ray Fowler and lighting consultant Greg Friedheim. When you live with art, says Male, "lighting becomes very important, and as the art is moved, we go back and tweak the lighting." For furniture advice, the owners relied, too, on New York-based antiques dealer Anthony DeLaurenco. They also became good students of the contemporary art scene and patrons of the nationally regarded Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami. That latter affiliation led them to discover artists who began to emerge in Miami in the 1990s; they now have two pieces, for example, by 29-year-old Florida native Bhakti Baxter.

Above: The dining room is home to a handmade wood-slab table by Mira Nakashima (daughter of George) and six Vladimir Kagan Lucite-legged chairs in the original Jack Lenor Larsen fabric. Reproduction Serge Mouille pendants are from Guerdon; art is by (from left) Robert Rotherwell, Susan Rotherberg and Bhakti Baxter. Opposite: A Claes Oldenburg sculpture sits at the foot of the dramatic, white-oak staircase.





Midwesterners

at heart, the owners of the penthouse are gregarious and naturally gracious, sharing their apartment with a wide circle of friends and family at the holidays and opening it to an occasional fundraiser. They have three grown children, only one of whom lives in Miami, so guest bedrooms were a necessity.

So too were spaces to accommodate their particular interests. She is a quilter of considerable accomplishment, though to hear her tell it, she sews. He is a dentist turned manufacturer who loves tools and has a fully equipped tool room that many homeowners would envy. He spends much of each day working in his office, which has a command-post position in the loftlike second floor at the top of the apartment's remarkable stairs.

With its tension-stretched steel cable railing, the stairway leading to the second floor is in its own way a work of art. It is austere and minimal, yet it has a sculptural presence—a key goal of its design—

and provides a strong geometric counterpoint, and a sense of orientation, within the more free-flowing apartment.

Indeed, the juxtaposition of the fluid and the angular is a continuing theme throughout the apartment. In the living room, a custom shag rug—it's essentially kidney-shaped—reinforces the biomorphic form of the Kagan sofa that started it all, and the furniture that is anchored by the cast-bronze coffee table by Philip Laverne embellishes the idea. A dramatic, if small, side table by Maria Pergo, an upholstered chair by Gianuse & Bonetti and two Jacques Charpentier side chairs complete the seating ensemble.

This page: The den at the west end of the apartment includes a Delta Botz sofa, a vintage Vladimir Kagan lounge, a custom Flair of Carta rug from the Rug Company and a Mika Nakashima table as well as a Curtis Jere Crane lamp and art by Shakti Saxler. The organic-shaped shelf is topped in quartz. Opposite: The husband's tool room has custom cabinetry and a ceiling stool with a motorcycle seat.



What the Pros Know

If you are creating a space for a significant collection, it's important not to compete with the objects on view, be they paintings, sculptures or furniture. "Because of the organic, flowing quality of the space, I didn't want wood or a grid of tiles on the floor," says Judi Male. To this end, she chose polished stained concrete for the floors—an application that would be normal in a gallery but that seems daring in the kind of penthouse where marble might be more expected. It is, however, a perfect foil for the art. "In order to get that wonderful smooth feel, you must pour a topping slat," says Male. Once cured, the concrete is then stained to get a chemical reaction with the color variations afforded by the mix of minerals in the stain. "It really is a work of art," says Male. Here, the color chosen was a rich brown that looks like tortoiseshell. Once the staining process is complete, the floor can be sealed, polished, waxed to a sheen. Sometimes, for example in art galleries seeking a more industrial look, the concrete is left with a matte finish, but more often, the goal is luster.

The master

site was rearranged to take advantage of the stunning views across the bay to the ocean. Like the rest of the apartment, the bedroom is minimal, the better to feature additional highlights from the collections. "Art needs to speak," says the husband. "When the setting is cluttered, it's hard to appreciate any one piece. It all competes, if only subliminally."

A painting by Frank Stella hangs above a table by Mira Nakashima—she is now the creative force behind the design studio that bears the name of her late father, the legendary George Nakashima. "We started to collect the father," says the owner, "but we really grew to love Mira's work." Like true collectors, these homeowners are always moving forward, eager to learn and appreciate; thus, little in this apartment reflects the past—although there are needlepoint pillows, a handmade quilt and the highlights of a once-larger collection of martini sets. One vestige of prior houses shows up in the master bath: two Venetian mirrors, "really wonderful pieces," says Male. They hang over almost austere modern fixtures.

For Male, the process of design is a journey, and it's one she does not take alone. "That's the joy of it," she says. Her academic and professional grounding in art history and in furniture history meant that working with avid and enthusiastic collectors was all the more stimulating and pleasurable. "We made it happen together. It was really that old cliché—a labor of love for all of us." ●

See *Remains*, last page.

This page (from top): A Vladimir Kagan lounge and a Mira Nakashima side table join a Frank Stella painting in one corner of the master bedroom; displayed on white-ash shelving are two prized "souvenirs": a petzhevnik Prada bag and shoes that the wife calls her "ruby red slippers." Opposite: The master bath, with its freestanding tub by Philippe Starck for Dornik and Aquagrande sink from L'acava.

