

ART + CRAFT

An urban townhome is warmed with organic materials, craftsmanship, cool lighting and art.

By Elaine Markoutsas
Photography by Werner Straube

Sheer raw space spoke to Nancy Bernstein the minute she stepped into the four-level brick building, all concrete slab and steel-clad windows, near a busy downtown intersection. She had no doubts. There was so much light; it was new; and it had a two-car attached garage. "There was so much to love about it," she says.

For Bernstein, an interior designer, and her husband, a surgeon, this was a bold move. "We were coming from the suburbs," she says. "We raised our kids there (three daughters, ages 26, 24 and 20), but we were looking forward to the next phase rather than being sad that the youngest was leaving home."

Her first goal after taking over the space was to warm the interiors. "The building is very cold; it's all black brick and steel. It could have been ultracontemporary playing up the steel with leather. I wanted to keep a modern feel but with a lot of texture and wood instead," Bernstein explains.

Collaborating with the architectural firm Morgante-Wilson, and specifically Fred Wilson and Michael Shively, with whom she had done a number of design projects, led to a certain comfort level.

"We totally get each other," says Shively. Once the homeowners decided how they wanted to live among the four levels, the fun began. Bernstein and Shively distinguished the functions of the different areas, selected a mix of natural materials and then set out to make it all feel like home.

MONOCHROMATIC MIX Layering a variety of neutral tones and textural elements creates a warm, calming ambience in the home's main living area. The art on either side of the fireplace is by Bryan Ivan Graves, through bigartchicago.com.





MAKE AN ENTRANCE
 Above: The large kitchen islands are often used as dining tables for entertaining, and the open seating area creates a good flow for guests to mingle. Opposite page: The dramatic stairway, with open risers and graceful curves that are encased in glass, makes a spectacular first impression in the entryway.

To achieve a gracious entry, the staircase was positioned next to soaring windows instead of hugging the wall. Its gentle curve, open walnut risers and handrail create a dramatic focal point. Upstairs, natural light informs the design. "This is where you want to live—in the treetops," says Shively. The floor plan is open, and the materials are lighter and more refined than on the lower level. Walnut 4-inch-wide planks pave the floor, and cerused white oak, with a graphic reveal, clads the walls. "The key to modern design is craft," says Shively. Creating dramatic spaces for art also was a goal for Bernstein, but not at the expense of storage space. A clever installation that accomplishes both tasks is in the living area. Paint and chalk-art "walls" frame a warm glazed metallic-tile fireplace, then slide open to reveal shelving inside. Furnishings are clean-lined and neutral, anchored by a Christian Liaigre sofa and Poltrona Frau chairs that are upholstered in tonal fabrics, with a subtle pattern appearing only on the wool Stark rug. Craftsmanship especially plays out in the kitchen, where architectural elements mix deftly with woods,

steel and marble (carefully chosen for its grain) so that the combination of natural materials becomes art itself. "We really wanted a double island," says Bernstein, "and a sitting area in the same room. Any time I entertain, everybody's in the kitchen." The islands, punctuated with X motifs on the steel-framed end panels, are a good size—around 3 feet by 6 feet. "One is almost always used as a kitchen table," says Bernstein. "Opposite that wall is a television—my husband's theory of interior design." A passage from the kitchen contains a well-outfitted butler's pantry and bar, all beautifully appointed in the same cerused oak used upstairs that contributes to a seamless flow. "Refrigerator drawers, icemaker, doors to the powder room and elevator—there's a rhythm that weaves everything together," says Shively. One challenge of the third-level floor plan was managing sound, especially in the space open to the stairs. "The half-elliptical shape of the vestibule aligns with the shape above, and the graphic style mimics that on the building's windows, so we worked that geometry

DESIGN DETAILS

TYPE

Multi-level townhome

LOCATION

Downtown

ARCHITECTURE

Morgante-Wilson Architects
Michael Shively, AIA Associate
Principal

morgantewilson.com

INTERIOR DESIGN

Nancy Bernstein Designs
nancybernsteindesigns.com

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Kettelkamp & Kettelkamp
Landscape Architecture
kandkla.com

MILLWORK

Lambright Woodworking
260.593.2997

RESOURCES

Holly Hunt

Sofa upholstery, drapery, nesting tables
and Bahia cocktail table in living room
hollyhunt.com

Ann Sacks

Fireplace wall tile and
master bath limestone floor
annsacks.com

Christian Liaigre

Sofa, at David Sutherland Showroom
davidsutherlandshowroom.com

Poltrona Frau

Living room and dining room chairs
at WPA Chicago, wpachicago.com

Bocci

Stairway light fixture
bocci.ca

Porcelanosa

Ferroker entryway tile
porcelanosa-usa.com

Ligne Roset

Plum sofa in sitting area
ligne-roset-usa.com

B&B Italia

Kitchen lounge chair and ottoman
bebitalia.com

Maya Romanoff

Wallcoverings
mayaromanoff.com

Van Cleave Woodworking

Custom cerused oak desk and cabinetry
vancleavewoodworking.com

Arteriors

Master-bedroom lamps
arteriorshome.com



SOAK IT IN A custom-made screen divides the open-concept bathroom that features a stone tub from Hydrology and an unfussy chandelier. The interplay of natural materials and different wood continues the neutral scheme from the main living areas.



FIFTY SHADES OF GRAY From top: A modern and lush velvet settee, grass cloth wallcovering, an upholstered bed frame and headboard, and wall-to-wall carpeting add warmth—both visually and literally—to the master bedroom; the penthouse-level balcony features a fibercast concrete fire table, making the

through the house,” says Shively. They accomplished this by having an artist build a door of curved metal and glass in the same shape. “It’s almost like a Faberge egg; it opens like a little jewel,” continues Shively. It also privatizes and buffers sound to the suite, which on one side leads to the office, and on the other, the master bedroom.

In the master bath, a sculptural stone tub anchors the space visually. “It’s totally spectacular,” says Shively. Bernstein incorporated mirrors to help bounce light around the windowless space. The 4-by-5-foot shower has a custom door made out of brass so that it won’t rust and is finished with a dark patina.

The quality of light throughout is one of the strengths of the architecture, and equally important is its indoor-outdoor relationship—not the least of which had to do with the four-legged residents (Milo, a golden doodle who is a therapy dog at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago; and cockapoos Cody and Waffles). A third-floor balcony space was designed especially for them.

“We created a little doggy bathroom area,” says Shively, “with a large shower pan hooked up to the roof drain and filled it with gravel. There’s even a doggie door.” Pavers, Trex decking and an elegant planter finish out the creative solution.

A true outdoor oasis lives on the penthouse level. Plant boxes line the perimeter, showcasing a fringe of grasses and a remarkable view of the city that includes the Willis Tower. Handwoven resin furniture along with a fibercast concrete fire table make for a cozy outdoor space on warm or chilly evenings. “Being able to use that space all the time is very important,” says Bernstein. “It makes such a difference to be able to go up there.”

This summer, they plan to add a pergola with a retractable shade, which makes this a perfect city home. “You learn some things living in the suburbs,” says Bernstein. “There are some creature comforts you want to bring with you.” ■

