



open book

AN EMPTY-NESTER COUPLE DOWNSIZES HIGH ABOVE THE CITY, RELAXING INTO A FRESH TAKE ON CLASSICAL STYLE.

WRITTEN BY **JORGE S. ARANGO** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **WERNER STRAUBE**

Life is a constant evolution of tastes. As Ezra Pound once observed, “There is no reason why the same man should like the same books at 18 and at 48.” Discovering more than a preference for different literature after their children left home, Chicago-based financial services consultant Tom Thilman and his wife Laura turned a page in their own story when scaling down to a smaller residence. “We didn’t just start a new chapter,” says Laura of their move from the suburbs to the city. “We really closed the whole book on our 25 years in Winnetka.”

After selling their home in that quaint village north of Chicago and spending a transitional stint in a co-op in the city, the couple purchased an apartment in what is arguably one of the most prestigious Gold Coast addresses imaginable: a 1929 French Renaissance Revival high-rise designed by the firm McNally & Quinn, but with Rosario Candela, famous for his Park Avenue buildings, acting as associate architect. “We basically took a four-bedroom apartment and repurposed it as a two-bedroom,” says designer Tom Stringer, who worked on the home alongside project associate Becky Yager. Fortunately, he adds, “It had glorious spaces that hadn’t been ruined by multiple generations of decision making.” This became the backdrop for what one could call “the new book of Thilman.”

INTERIOR DESIGN Tom Stringer, IIDA, and Becky Yager, Tom Stringer Design Partners
ARCHITECTURE Joan Craig, AIA, LEED AP, and Erich Wefing, Lichten Craig Architecture + Interiors
HOME BUILDER Barry Sylvester, Sylvester Construction Services, Inc.
BEDROOMS 2 | **BATHROOMS** 4 | **SQUARE FEET** 3,000



A Dennis & Leen mirror, through Holly Hunt, hangs above the homeowners' stone console in the entry hall, which features walls covered in Slubby Silk from D.L. Couch. The bowl is from local Chinese antiques dealer Pagoda Red.

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With all of Candela's inherent trademarks present—2¼-inch-thick oak strip floors, elegant paneling, plaster molding details and main rooms arranged in a majestic enfilade—public spaces were preserved largely intact. However, restoration of some details was required, and the team—which also included architect Joan Craig, project architect Erich Wefing and general contractor Barry Sylvester—had to rethink the spaces for their clients' new lifestyle.

For instance, the existing dining room became a family room. "I'm done with cooking!" exclaims Laura with relief. Stringer then created two seating areas in the sprawling living room, dividing them with a table that expands to accommodate 10 for family holidays and the rare dinner party. An island that seats two in the new kitchen is where the couple now occasionally dine; the space is often used to enjoy cocktails and hors d'oeuvres.



A 20th Century Lighting chandelier provides the grand gesture in the family room, which showcases armchairs reupholstered in a Clarence House Abelia stripe and a sofa in Rogers & Goffigon's Somerset linen. Keleen's Soho leather envelops custom ottomans. Underfoot is a rug by designer Tom Stringer.



Dessin Fournir's Rateau coffee table fashions a modern silhouette against the living room's traditional Minton-Spidell chairs—swathed in Vervain cut velvet and Fabricut's silk ticking stripe—and Rose Tarlow Fleurette draperies in charcoal on wheat. The rug is a custom design by Stringer.



In the living room, the black chest was a prop that the owners purchased from the Clarence House showroom at The Merchandise Mart. Above it is a painting brought back from Venice by the husband's parents 60 years ago.

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Because the Thilmans desired a luxurious master suite, the back of the apartment was altered more dramatically. "Our Winnetka bedroom was always nice," says Laura, "but it wasn't just ours; the kids were in and out of there all the time." So Craig collapsed spaces into one guest room with a bathroom and one master suite with his-and-her baths, "the secret of a happy marriage," Craig jokes. The architect also widened the doorway between the newly designed kitchen she renovated and the family room.

Any good book demands some editing, of course. And so, Stringer helped the Thilmans cull their own possessions and give what remained a more modern countenance, freely mixing in traditionally styled contemporary furnishings. "They'd been through a phase of decorating that was pattern on pattern," he says. "In order to make things classical yet fresh, vital and



Left: Mirrored doors hide a fire exit in the wife's bath, which showcases Waterworks' onyx-and-marble mosaic floor, cabinetry by Exclusive Woodworking and a chair from Robuck & Company Antiques in Atlanta. Far left: Chelsea Editions' crewelwork draperies inspired the palette in the master bedroom, where a Niermann Weeks bed faces a custom armoire.



Dessin Fournir's Morgan table and the homeowners' existing chairs, re-covered in Holly Hunt's Great Plains Heart & Soul and Rose Tarlow's Mini Check, center the living room below Baker's Georgian lantern. *Right:* The homeowners' collection of silver candlesticks on the table.



Hinson & Company's coarse Madagascar cloth wallcovering is a casual envelope for the library's period built-in shelving and trim, painted in Pratt & Lambert's Roubidoux 2304-000. The soft hue of Jim Thompson's gray matelassé on the Dessin Fournir chairs is a sedate counterpoint to the ottoman's Manuel Canovas cut-velvet floral fabric.

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younger, we approached fabrics in a different way." Stringer instead reserved pattern for accents—pillows, rugs and draperies—while upholstery choices were primarily made in solid silks, velvets and weaves, mostly in a palette of camel, charcoal and ivory. This makes rooms clean enough to accommodate grand gestures: an imposing lantern in the living room, an impressively scaled chandelier in the family room and bold graphic patterns on rugs. And to impart a sense of continuity, "A minor color in one space becomes primary in another, so rooms evolve and flow," says Stringer.

In the end, did the Thilmans' literary tastes actually change? Probably not. But, metaphorically at least, Stringer's and Craig's maneuvers mimic a similar evolution: They transport this residence from florid prose to spare poetry. **L**