



BLANK CANVAS

White walls, stone floors and fine custom furnishings create a gallery-like pied-à-terre for a pair of North Shore art enthusiasts.

By Tate Gunnerson | Photography by Jamie Padgett

"When you're building a gallery, the art should speak with the loudest voice," explains interior designer Tom Stringer of the two-bedroom pied-à-terre on Lake Shore Drive that he renovated for a Lake Forest couple who has an extensive and ever-growing art collection. "Artwork on the wall creates a sense of grace and beauty," the wife explains. "I wanted to live in an art gallery with comfortable furniture."

Over the years, the unit was done in a classical Italian style with faux columns, arched windows and other details that felt out of sync with both its modernist architecture and intended use as a gallery space. To create the clean, contemporary abode that his clients envisioned, Stringer eliminated such details while retaining more appropriate elements such as the Crema Marfil marble flooring in the entry, which the designer honed and carried into the main living areas. "We're just borrowing from museum traditions," Stringer explains.

Thus, a new fenestration detail along the window wall conceals shades to shield the artwork from damaging UV light. The architectural detail also conceals unsightly through-wall air conditioners, providing a deep ledge for the display of sculptures and framing the expansive lake vistas. "There's a sense of serenity," Stringer explains. "You're floating above the edge of the water, and the beach is below you."

To compensate for the lack of interstitial space between floors, the designer eschewed canned lighting in favor of a

CONVERSATION STARTER
In one corner of the living room, Tom Stringer created an intimate seating area with four upholstered chairs grouped around a handsome



THE ART OF DISPLAY
From top: By refacing the cabinets, building a new island topped with quartz and swapping out the countertops and backsplash, Stringer was able to create a brand-new look without a complete renovation. The TV above the sink can easily be seen from the adjacent living area; the family room features silk and wool rugs to provide a soft contrast to the modern custom furnishings. Opposite page: A minimally invasive monorail lighting system provides the flexibility for the space to function as an art gallery, where pieces can be rotated often.

monorail system that is both sleek and flexible. "This apartment functions as a living art gallery, which means that paintings are never fixed," Stringer explains. "It required a lot of work to develop elegant lighting and mechanical details."

The quiet, refined aesthetic that Stringer created is especially evident in the great room, which the designer has divided into distinct seating areas defined by graphite silk and wool rugs. "The rugs are texturally opulent in the way that is opposite of the matte stone," he explains. "When you don't have pattern and color to play with, texture and sheen become even more important. At close range, everything has a higher level of detail than is first apparent."

A custom library table between the two sitting areas can be used either as a desk or a dining table. "We were able to combine the living and dining rooms into one grand salon," says Stringer.

Although the designer made few changes to the open kitchen, refacing the cabinetry and incorporating a new island with a dark quartz top gave it a more modern feeling. "We just modified where we needed to," Stringer explains. "When the owners are in the city, they want to enjoy the wonderful restaurants that are within walking distance."

In the bedrooms, Stringer purposefully veered away from the cool gallery aesthetic by covering the floors with wool and silk





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carpeting, and the walls with paper-backed linen. "It allows us to maintain the neutral envelope but build something that creates emotional warmth for the more private spaces," he says, pointing to the closet doors, which conceal built-in cabinetry. "Theoretically, [the couple] could hang art on the closet doors and continue to expand their display space in that way."

Indeed, the owners are thrilled with their newly renovated home away from home, which Stringer furnished down to the finest detail. "The unveiling was a lot of fun because every dish was in place; the candles

were lit; and the music was playing," the wife explains. "We had not seen the apartment for weeks and had never seen the furniture in it. When we walked in, it was 100 percent ready to go."

After spending an hour answering questions about the design, Stringer and his team made their departure just in time for the owners to host more than a dozen of their close friends. "There were loads of wows," the wife says. "It's gracious and comfortable but also contemporary and art-filled. There isn't a thing that we don't like about it." ■

INNER BEAUTY
The bedrooms have been wrapped in paper-backed linen for warmth and texture. Custom built-in cabinetry hides behind pivot doors covered with the same material. "Theoretically, [the couple] could hang art on the closet doors and continue to expand their display space," Stringer explains. Opposite page: The intimate dressing area is one of the homeowners' favorite elements.



DESIGN DETAILS

TYPE
Condo

LOCATION
Gold Coast

DESIGN
Tom Stringer Design Partners
tomstringer.com

RESOURCES

Holly Hunt
Living room sofa
hollyhunt.com

Primitive
Upholstered chairs
bepimitive.com

A. Rudin
Quartet of living room chairs and library chairs in great room, desk chair in master bedroom
arudin.com

Tom Stringer Design Partners with fabrication by Brent Schwarz Design
Custom library table and cocktail table in living room, custom sofa, chair, coffee table, ottomans and wall shelf in study, desk in master bedroom
tomstringer.com; Brent Schwarz Design, 262.348.9810

Made Goods
Living room side tables, study accent table
madegoods.com

Watson Smith
Rugs in living room and study
watsonsmithinc.com

Arteriors Home
Nesting tables in living room, lamps in master bedroom
arteriorshome.com

Tom Stringer Design Partners with fabrication by Monte Allen Designers' Workroom
Sofa and chair in media room, bed and side tables in master bedroom, bed and desk in guest bedroom
tomstringer.com; monteallen.com

Hickory Chair
Upholstered chair in master bedroom
hickorychair.com

Phillip Jeffries
Tweed linen wallcovering in guest bedroom
phillipjeffries.com

Donghia
Upholstery fabric on chair in guest bedroom
donghia.com