

# luxe

INTERIORS+DESIGN®

CHICAGO



# Jazz Age

A 1920s duplex in Lincoln Park is revived with a modern edge.

WRITTEN BY MONIQUE MCINTOSH  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RYAN HAINEY



Architecture: Timothy O'Neil, Kaufman | O'Neil Architecture Interior Design: Aimee Wertepny, Lauren Warnock and Sanja Kerr, Project.  
Home Builder: Jonathan Rubenstein, JAR Corp



# M

elissa and Ken Erke are no strangers to contemporary architecture, from their sleek West Loop penthouse to their former industrial brick loft. For their next

abode, however, the design lovers found themselves veering away from their modern tendencies.

“We’ve become attracted to the vintage look, that era of marble and herringbone floors,” Ken says.

Enter a 1929 lakefront duplex designed by prolific Chicago architect Robert De Golyer. The interior had lost most of its original finishes through the decades, yet the ghosts of historic glamour lingered along the original crown molding and spiral staircase. Hopeful of its promise, the couple turned to designers Aimee Wertepny, Lauren Warnock and Sanja Kerr to extract the apartment’s full potential.

As their third home with the couple, the team fully embraced the pivot. “We collectively felt like doing something different for them, leaning into that vintage style,” recalls Warnock, who has since founded NavyBlack Studio. They opted for an eclectic mix of “contemporary Art Deco with moments of midcentury modern and tempered Parisian glam,” Wertepny says.

The duplex’s revised floor plan, reformed by architect Timothy O’Neil and general contractor Jonathan Rubenstein, adopts more modern proportions. “We weren’t afraid to change things that weren’t working so the home can thrive for another hundred years,” O’Neil explains. Gone is the cramped kitchen set behind the stairwell, designed when such places were concealed from polite company. The new version now seamlessly flows into the dining area. In turn, the maid’s quarters became a den equipped with a marble-encased bar.

Upstairs, some creative geometry transformed the primary bath into a spa-like retreat, with new piping concealed beneath the tub’s platform. Two separate bedrooms merged into the expansive primary suite. Daily life now eloquently drifts from room to room thanks to widened case openings. “Circulation was tight and didn’t feel very gracious,” O’Neil notes. “We were sensitive to improving the flow of spaces.”

Once proportionally balanced, the interiors became saturated in material richness. “We leaned into a ‘more is more’ approach,” Warnock explains. Black paint accentuates the original spiral staircase and new curved archways inspired by

the building’s limestone entrance. Deeply veined marble further fortifies the home’s glamour. The monolithic Breccia Nero and Calaglio marble fireplaces have “Art Deco written all over them,” she adds. Contrasting oxblood and gray marble countertops transform the kitchen, with its black-and-white checkered floor, into a chic showpiece.

Wood tones throughout are dark and decadent, like the herringbone hardwood floors and walnut kitchen cabinetry featuring reeded millwork. More walnut lines the dining area’s built-in arch, which frames a custom banquette. Backed with smoky mirrors, the nook rivals the most coveted booth of any speakeasy. “We wanted something beautiful to differentiate the kitchen from the dining area—a place to light some candles and have a dinner party,” Warnock says.

This cocktail-hour spirit infuses all the home’s social spheres. In the living room, for example, “we wanted multiple seating areas like you’d find in a bespoke hotel lobby,” Warnock says. Back-to-back leather Chesterfield sofas form intimate clusters for conversation. “It’s so nice you can move around the space when you have people over,” Ken observes. “It gives such new energy to the evenings.”

Amid these sumptuous surroundings, select furnishings from the couple’s previous abodes are peppered throughout. Some, like the bedroom lounge area’s club chairs, were “reupholstered and refinished for a totally different look,” notes Kerr, who now works with NavyBlack Studio. Other familiar items, like the dining area’s Platner chairs, needed no adjustments. “That’s the beauty of timeless pieces,” Wertepny observes. “From a timber loft to an übermodern penthouse to this classic co-op apartment, those chairs still look right at home.”

Bolts of leather, velvet and mohair upholstery marry old with new, steeped in wine reds and inky blacks. Rugs are equally lush, especially the custom runner dripping vibrant red down the stairwell. “We kept equating the color palette to a fine cabernet: bold, smooth, soft on the edges and a little funky,” Wertepny says. Against this backdrop, light fixtures featuring brass metals and fluted glass flash like jewelry.

Now, everyday moments feel imbued with a sense of refinement, from sunrise views while enjoying coffee in bed to sunset cocktails on the swivel chairs in the living room. “We throw those living room windows open in the summer, and it feels like we are on the beach,” Melissa shares. “Those chairs see a lot of conversation, music and cocktails.” ■



Featuring Green Andes quartzite from Calia Stone Boutique, a custom bar by New Style Cabinets holds pride of place beneath Alexa Hampton for Visual Comfort & Co. sconces. A plush leather chair and marble-topped coffee table, both by Four Hands, flesh out the lounge area.



The dining room's New Style Cabinets-crafted archway frames a custom banquette backed by an antique mirror from Karesh Glass. The Platner chairs and Arteriors fixture add drama to the Modloft dining table.



**Above:** Walnut kitchen cabinetry by New Style Cabinets is further elevated by such details as the island's reeded millwork. Brass accents, like the Waterworks faucet and Visual Comfort & Co. sconce, complement the wood's rich tones.

**Opposite:** Swaths of marble turn the kitchen into a showpiece, with checkered floors from Classic Tile and two different slabs from Calia Stone Boutique for the countertops: A merlot-tinged Rosso Levanto adorns the island, while Calacatta Monet covers the perimeter. The appliances are by Thermador.



An Art Deco-inspired fireplace by Material Bespoke Stone + Tile adds classic glamour to the bedroom sitting area. The Arhaus chair is paired with a custom table featuring Rosso Levanto marble from Calia Stone Boutique.





**Above:** Garnet-hued tile by Sonoma Tilemakers on the powder room wall complements a Rosso Levanto marble sink. A coat of Benjamin Moore's Midnight Oil and a tapered Chapman & Myers for Visual Comfort & Co. sconce lend to the moody vibe.

**Left:** Light filters into the bedroom through drapery crafted by Basia Frossard Projects, reflecting off the Julie Neill for Visual Comfort & Co. chandelier. Arteriors nightstands and lamps flank the bed, while a Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams sofa curves around an Arteriors table.