

FROM OUTDATED TO OUTSTANDING

MODERN DESIGN GIVES A MUCH-NEEDED UPDATE TO A '70S NEW YORK APARTMENT

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For an experienced designer, an apartment renovation is just another day on the job. But when that apartment is in a New York City high-rise and the project must be completed in less than two months before one of the building's two elevators is taken out of commission—and the client is in Los Angeles the entire time—the designer better be able to handle the pressure.

Rona Landman of Rona Landman Interior Design Inc. met her client for the first time in the Hamptons to discuss the redesign of a two-bedroom, 1970s art deco apartment on 52nd Street. What was first thought to be a smaller project, consisting of redecorating the living room and fixing up a few other spots in the space, turned into a full renovation. The crux of the project? All the work had to be finished in less than two months.

"They were refurbishing an elevator, and when there is only one elevator in use in a building, you can't use it for construction purposes," Landman explains. "I had to finish the construction in six weeks, but thank God it worked out well."

When she first set eyes on the space, she saw an outdated apartment with gray walls, gray tiles with a border of salmon and turquoise, black trim, and furnishings of green and purple. "I guess that was the look back then," she says.

The designer's first step was to make a little sketch of the main living areas, adding in a glass partition between living room and dining room, which is elevated, to open up the space. The client, a clothing designer living in his Los Angeles home during the project, saw the sketch the same way he saw

every plan, every fabric, every photo of the project: via FedEx overnight shipping. "He liked the idea and the floor plan and told me to go for it," Landman says. "I gave him a presentation of all the colors, keeping it really clean with white and brown and black. It's a very different palette from what he was used to. He approved everything. He's very decisive and knew what he wanted."

The construction phase began with ripping out everything in the living room. Archways made of brick were filled in. The ceiling beams had to stay, but the designer made them less conspicuous by painting them the same white as the walls, which were covered in seven coats of lacquer paint. Also unable to change the wiring, all the fixtures were replaced. The wood floors were refurbished. In the kitchen, the cabinets were the only survivors, although they were refinished. New appliances were brought in. Marble countertops were added.

Landman says that seeing the final vision is easy for her. "I'm very good with space," she says. "My eye can pick up what shouldn't be there, how to reconfigure it, which way to make it more livable, more open in feeling. What's most important is the light that I have, which he had a lot of, but it was covered up."

With 15-foot ceilings, the 52nd Street apartment had soaring windows, illuminating the space with natural light during the day. For evening, Landman went with soft lighting options. "Most of it is up lighting," she says. "Mood lighting. Nothing harsh."

The mostly white palette was accented with black and brown, primarily seen in various woods, pillows, the living

Designer Rona Landman included black and white Sid Avery photographs throughout the apartment to create the ambience of Hollywood glamour.





A mostly neutral palette is enhanced with a variety of textures and punches of color.



room fireplace, and the dining room chairs. Punches of color were added to make the space more lively. “Coming from what he had, I wanted to keep it pretty subtle and use restraint. Like the moss green of the grass on the coffee table is almost enough for the room. The silk flowers give a little color. The phone in the bedroom. I didn’t want to overwhelm the space with anything too strong.”

While the artwork is fun, it keeps to the minimal color palette. The bulk of the art is black and white Sid Avery photographs, blown up to poster size, which helped create the overall design theme of Hollywood glamour that’s toned down.

And though white rules the color scheme, Landman says it’s all about the white-on-white textures that keep it interesting. “It may be one color, but there’s everything from cashmere to wool to leather to tweed to linen,” she says. “He likes good textures, interesting textures. That was a big part of the look.”

Landman, who earned her degree from the New York School of Interior Design and has owned her business for 16 years, says that although she’s worked on both residential and commercial projects in Florida, Connecticut, New Jersey, and all of New York City, it’s the New York City lofts that are her favorite. “It’s more creative. I get to use so many different textures,” says the designer, who’s been married 25 years and has two grown children.

She is unfazed by the hassles of New York City design and construction, though she does admit, “New York is the biggest pain in the neck to work in,” citing parking issues, small service elevators, and millions of dollars in insurance. She’s even had to hoist extra large materials up five floors to get them into a space. But though there are challenges, Landman says knowing the tricks is what gets her by. “There are so many rules in New York,” she admits. “But if you can do it here, you can do it anywhere.” ■

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