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Armed with cunning ideas and color, two imaginative design pros give a staid Lake Shore Drive co-op a modern update.

BY LISA SKOLNIK



Vivid blue walls transport a vintage co-op into the 21st century; modern complements such as a high-gloss ceiling and sleek chandelier further the updates to the living room, while traditional pieces clad in kicky colors and a neutral carpet and coffee table add balance.



WORLD

The 18th-century, hand-carved Louis XVI paneling went from fussy to fabulous—and timely—thanks to a coat of paint. Its vibrant new hue makes antique pieces in a corner of the room feel equally relevant to today.



ummer Thornton can attest to the fact that good bones only go so far. Take the sprawling vintage co-op in Chicago's Gold Coast that she and architect Michael Graham of Liederbach & Graham recently renovated.

Despite its dazzling Beaux Arts architecture, rife with exquisite period design details, says Thornton, "It was sad and drab."

Dated updates and dowdy design choices weighed heavily on those good bones. "It was beautiful, but everything was done in 100 shades of brown," observes Thornton, who heads an eponymous Chicago interior design firm. Even glorious, hand-carved, 18th-century paneling in the living room imported from France when the building went up in 1929 had become a decorative detriment in the monochromatic milieu rather than a *pièce de résistance* as originally intended. "More brown," Thornton sighs.

The potential owners, a sophisticated and spirited couple, were looking for a Northern residence to escape Florida's oppressive summer heat. But they wanted a home that would have the same assets as their bright, airy cold-weather retreat close to the ocean—"great views and easy access to the coast," Graham says.

Unlike their Florida home, the couple wanted a culturally exciting environment. New York and Chicago were options since the husband had lived in both cities during his high-powered finance career. But he was enamored with Chicago; the wife, a former attorney, less so. Yet Chicago won once the couple settled on the architecturally spectacular co-op—seductive thanks to its storied provenance, lakefront views and proximity to the shore.

Yet the co-op needed a major overhaul. "It was so dreary that I didn't really think we could live there," admits the wife, a

fan of inventive design and vivid color. Her mantra for their Northern home was "fresh, happy and fun." Graham, who had worked on a previous Chicago residence for the husband, "made the transformation possible," the wife says.

His secret sauce? "I figured out how to give them exactly what they wanted," he quips. That turned out to be a home with dazzling views, bathed in equally dazzling color.

Graham's initial thoughts about the kitchen morphed into a broader program that solved the first issue. "It was originally designed for servants," Graham explains, "and looked like it. The windows overlooked the brick walls of the building next door." His suggestion—to borrow space from the expansive foyer to enlarge the kitchen, then open it up to the dining room so it could have lake views—quickly expanded: "We realized we could reorient all of the public rooms so they could look out on the lake," Graham explains.

Besides enlarging and overhauling the kitchen, Graham expanded the apertures between each room, opening up sightlines and securing those coveted lake views. Pocket doors ensured that the living and dining rooms could be closed off for formal occasions.

An introduction to Thornton solved the second problem. "She wanted fresh, happy, colorful and fun, and all of Summer's work is like that," notes Graham. "She's spunky and fearless, especially when it comes to color."

Thanks to Thornton's exuberance and ingenuity, one meeting was all it took to seal the deal. "I was really excited about what we could do there, especially when [the wife] told me what she wanted," Thornton says. "But top on that list was to tear out the antique paneling, which she felt was fussy and dark. But Michael and I couldn't let them do that."

The bespoke Louis XVI paneling "is historically significant, and had been fastidiously restored and maintained over

From top: Playful Miró lithographs get the seat of honor in an informal dining area with the help of a fanciful Schumacher wallcovering and custom pieces from designer Summer Thornton; cotton-candy pink walls give the master bedroom a sweet demeanor, balanced by tailored pieces from a mix of periods, all with serious design chops.





Thornon had an artisan in Italy re-create this hand-dyed, marbled wall covering for the foyer, while the elevator door is painted cobalt, as are all the other doors in the co-op.

Famed 20th-century decorator Billy Baldwin pioneered the technique of sheathing walls and furniture in the same pattern; Thornton executed the strategy here with Baldwin's *Arbre de Matisse* from China Seas.



the years," Graham points out. But more saliently, "it had unbelievable potential," Thornton says. "I suggested they paint it an intense hue, like something out of a Matisse painting. I knew it would be a game-changer."

"Game-changer" is an understatement: Thornton's inventive proposal proved to be the project's eureka moment.

"The minute she suggested it, I was all in," Graham says. More significantly, so was the couple. Thornton's idea became the foundation for a strategy that informed the aesthetic of every space. "We took our inspiration from the bold, clear palette of modern and expressionist artists, especially for the unconventional way they paired colors," the designer says.

At Thornton's suggestion, the paneling was painted Farrow & Ball's St. Giles Blue, a passionate hue that not only turned it from fussy to fresh but also deepened the room's relationship to the lake. To further that connection, and give the space a huge dose of glamour, she lacquered the ceiling cloud white and punctuated it with a majestic, 3-foot-wide Venini chandelier circa 1960. With its barbell-shaped "crystals," the resplendent, milky Murano glass fixture adds gravitas and humor to the room, not to mention softly glimmering light at night.

Channeling Matisse again, Thornton gave the living room a bold, modern palette and kinky furnishings to offset the paneling's frothy flourishes. Deep sculptural sofas of her own design, upholstered in a sensuous berry red linen

velvet and skirted with Canton blue bullion fringe, anchor the space. Equally assertive pillows and art on the walls are countered with soft neutrals for balance.

The same playful but balanced strategy pervades every space. In the dining room, adeptly divided into areas for formal and daily dining, a deeply tufted cerulean blue banquette and a silver-and-white deco-inspired dining table are paired with a cheery floral wallpaper, energetic abstract Miró lithographs and tailored brass sconces fitted with lipstick red shades. Thornton

used the same pattern on the furniture and walls (Arbre de Matisse) to turn a dark, ordinary space into a cozy den. And sharply tailored traditional and modern pieces temper a palette of sugary pinks in the master suite.

Thornton's attention to the apartment's connecting elements—a long hallway and the newly broadened apertures—provides a cohesive framework for the eclectic spaces. By lacquering the hallway soft lavender, adding ledges to the walls and painting a beige stone floor the wife detested with a geometric pattern designed by her firm, Thornton turned the prosaic pass-through

into a serious, and stunning, gallery. And all of the doors in the public spaces, from those that clad the elevator that opens into the co-op to the pocket doors, are painted cobalt blue.

Today, the couple are so enamored with the transformation that they spend as much time in the home as their residency restraints allow. "It's a happy place to be," the wife says. And who doesn't want to be happy? ■

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