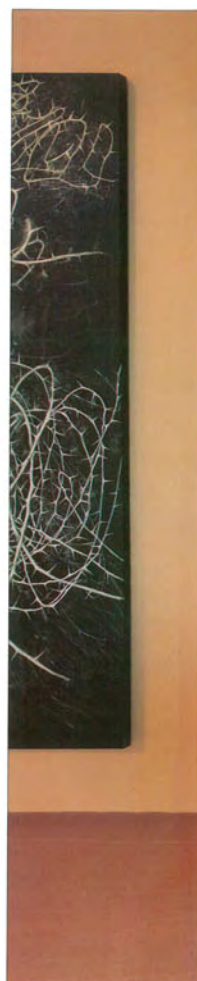


The Art of the Makeover

MINIMALISM REINVENTS A MIAMI APARTMENT

Robert Bray, Michael Schaible and Mitchell Turnbough, of the New York City-based firm Bray-Schaible Design, injected a Miami pied-à-terre with minimalist style. Window walls in the living room offer expansive vistas of Biscayne Bay. Rug from Patterson, Flynn & Martin.





Interior Design by
Bray-Schaible
Text by Jean Strouse
Photography by Dan Forer

Living with superb design spoils the eye for anything less. In 1999 a couple, who live primarily in Florida, bought and renovated a pied-à-terre in New York City. After they stayed there for the first time, recalls the husband, "our Miami apartment felt claustrophobic and mun-

dane." As a result, they asked the designers of the New York space—Robert Bray, Michael Schaible and Mitchell Turnbough, of the firm Bray-Schaible—to "spruce up" their Florida residence. "I really thought we weren't going to do much," the husband continues, "but once you start, it gets away from you." His wife adds with

a tolerant laugh, "I knew it would end up being a lot." Bray-Schaible had designed a Florida bank for this client in 1975. The New York renovation (see *Architectural Digest*, October 2000) was their second project together. "We love their minimalist style," says the husband. "It beautifully complements our collection

OPPOSITE ABOVE: Guillermo Kuitca's *Corona de Espinas*, 1994, hangs near a Barovier glass lamp and a Robjohn-Gibbins table and wood-frame chairs in the living room. A group of 1989 photographs by Bernd and Hilla Becher is at left. ABOVE: A 60-foot corridor leads from the living room, through two studies, into the bedroom.

of contemporary art, so for Miami we let them come up with whatever they wanted." Bray says he often encounters this kind of trust the second or third time he works with someone: "We had just spent a year and a half developing rapport and had a good idea of each other's desires, temperaments and needs."

The greatest asset of the three-bedroom Miami apartment was its location, with spectacular views of Key Biscayne and Biscayne Bay. The greatest challenges were low (eight-foot) ceilings, lack of character, tightly compartmentalized spaces and a layout that failed to take advantage of the views. "We

decided to open it all up," says Bray, "not to fight the rectilinear form but to exaggerate and elongate horizontal planes." They tore out walls, stripped cornice moldings and converted two of the bedrooms into studies (his and hers). And they opened the apartment's perimeter to the sea and sky.



The dramatic feature of the new design is a 60-foot corridor that runs along a wall of windows from the living room past both studies to the master bedroom. To create it, the Bray-Schaible trio cut five feet out of each of three interior walls adjacent and perpendicular to the windows. They ordered three five-by-eight-foot solid-core doors to swivel on concealed center-mount pivot hinges. But the installation process revealed another challenge: The floors and ceilings were not perfectly parallel. They were, in the owner's words, "cockeyed—it was maddening! Workmen

had to shave the doors and openings to fit, and there were no jambs to cover errors. It took three weeks to put in three doors!" Now, however, when the panels stand open (internal closures hold them in place), they lead the eye through a sleek arcade of space and light. Maple baseboards and bookshelves under the windows in the studies further stretch the perspective. The doors open in either direction and slowly close at a gentle push.

The owners' excellent art collection, which includes works by Donald Judd, Cy Twombly, Gerhard Richter,

Richard Diebenkorn, Eric Fischl, Susan Rothenberg and Robert Mangold, shaped the design aesthetic. "Long horizontals and uninterrupted surfaces provide breathing space for the paintings," explains Turnbough. "Each piece has its own moment." No doorknobs or light switches contend with the art: Switch plates have been set in baseboards, behind furniture or lower than usual. Moreover, strategically planned sight lines allow people in the living areas to see none of the apartment's mechanics, only creamy white wall planes, "as in a gallery," notes Schaible.

ABOVE: A mask from New Guinea is in the dining area, where chairs, with dark fabric from Holly Hunt, surround a marble-top table. OPPOSITE: "We wanted to create a gallery-like space for the clients' art collection," says Bray. Robert Mangold's *Three Squares Within a Triangle*, 1976, hangs in the dining area

This precision delights the husband, who describes himself as having "a mathematical mind." Mathematical but not rigid: Bray recalls that when his client asked him about color for the main seating area, "I hesitated, then said, 'Pink.' He laughed and said, 'Great!'"





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LEFT: Three 1964 untitled Richard Diebenkorn works line a wall in the wife's study. An Alexander Liberman sculpture rests on the desk, which is paired with a Bertioia chair. The 1951 swing-arm lamp is by Pierre Guariche. A '40s Barovier glass lamp is on the side table.



ABOVE: In the master bedroom are two Ellen Gallagher mixed-media works. A pair of suede-upholstered armchairs and a Robsjohn-Gibbins dark-oak low table are at the foot of the bed; a 1950 “gold-dust” Barovier glass lamp, on a circa 1820 Biedermeier commode, is beside it.

Pink it is, with silk and linen fabrics, Barovier glass lamps from the 1940s, tables and wood-frame chairs by Robsjohn-Gibbins, and a sofa and lounge chairs designed by Bray-Schaible. The owners developed a taste for Robsjohn-Gibbins and Barovier during the work on their Manhattan apartment—a pair of “gold-dust” Barovier lamps flank the bed in Miami, a dark-oak Robsjohn-Gibbins table stands at the foot of the bed, and the wife has a Barovier reading lamp in her study. What she likes best about this renovation is her desk: a vintage commercial office base of unpainted steel with a clear finish under a cobalt-blue, beveled glass top by Bray-Schaible. The only pieces the designers did not find in New York or create themselves were two Saarinen tables the couple had had since their wedding—now “spruced up”

with powder-coated bases and new Thassos marble tops—in the dining and breakfast areas. The apartment’s window wall continues along a setback at the corner of the living room, then wraps around the dining and breakfast areas. “From the dinner table, you never look out of just one window,” says Schaible. “In all kinds of weather, the seascape surrounds you.” A sense of spaciousness and seclusion is rare in a high-rise building. “Once you enter from the hallway, you feel as if you’re alone here,” observes Turnbough. “It’s a private house in disguise.” □