

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL DESIGN AUTHORITY

APRIL 2015

THE SMART SET

DECORATING
SECRETS
FROM DESIGN
EXPERTS

AD'S ULTIMATE
RENOVATION STYLE GUIDE

RENZO PIANO REINVENTS
THE WHITNEY MUSEUM



Veiled by a custom-made shade, a 1950s crystal chandelier is suspended in the living area of Neil Westreich and Michael O'Keefe's New York City apartment. The home's renovations were overseen by Bruce Bierman Design; biermandesign.com.



BRIGHT IDEAS

Designer Bruce Bierman turns the lofty spaces of a onetime Manhattan athletic club into a color-rich apartment packed with inspiring design solutions

On the same day that New York City lawyer Neil Westreich retired in 2006, he sold the classic prewar Park Avenue apartment that had been his home for two decades. Then he moved into a rental while renovating a new one-bedroom loft in the Chelsea neighborhood. And around then he also met Michael O'Keefe, a former private chef who is now his partner.

"It was time to change my lifestyle," Westreich says. "The Upper East Side is lovely, but I was almost always going to another part of the city to work, eat out,

attend the theater, even visit friends. Plus I thought, Why not get something fun?" And more centrally located.

He found both of those qualities and more in the Chelsea residence. It featured 3,400 square feet of space, 15-foot ceilings, and enormous windows and was conveniently situated between two multilined subway stations. Carved out of the racquetball courts of a defunct YMCA built back when Teddy Roosevelt was president, the apartment, which Westreich now shares with O'Keefe, offered the adventuresome sensibility he had wanted. Up to

a point. While the path of least resistance would have been to wash the impressively proportioned rooms in gallery-white, hang some contemporary art, and call it a day, he instead recruited interior designer Bruce Bierman to infuse the place with a bit of uptown luxury.

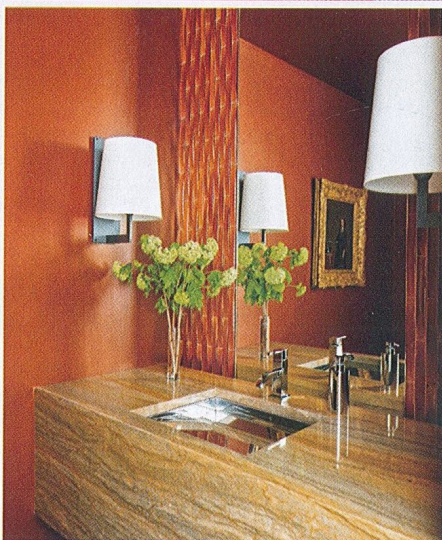
After installing robust modern sofas, chairs, and tables, Bierman layered the rooms with traditional items Westreich already owned, such as antique European paintings framed in gilded wood, a crystal chandelier from the 1950s, and a 1742 silver cake basket that was made by Huguenot master metalsmith Peter Archambo and once owned by Imelda Marcos. "There's

REINVENTION



something nice about transitioning pieces from one residence to another and seeing them in a totally different way," the designer observes.

The couple's sunny new dwelling also has excellent acoustics, which pleases Westreich, an arts patron whose parties have included live performances by singers and musicians from the Metropolitan Opera, Carnegie Hall, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra, where he is a member of the board of directors. During those events the living room has accommodated as many as 85 guests.



Clockwise from top left: A gilt-framed Teodor Axentowicz genre scene contrasts with a high-gloss shelf in the entrance hall. Lacquered bookshelves make a dramatic statement in the all-red library. The powder room features a vanity made of Macaubas Gold quartzite. Customized cabinetry conceals most of the appliances in the open kitchen.

magnificent proportions, so Bierman selected and designed muscular, overscale upholstered pieces that could hold their own. "In the living room, instead of a standard eight-foot-long sofa, there are two ten-foot-long sofas," he says. "Rather than using one cocktail table, I pushed together four to make a bolder statement."

ADAPT AND REUSE: The formal crystal chandelier that once hung in Westreich's Park Avenue dining room might not seem like a natural fit for a loft, but Bierman gave the fixture a mod new countenance, wrapping it in a drum shade custom made of sheer fabric and suspending it from the living room ceiling.

CLASSIC TOUCH: Bierman restored the existing early-20th-century moldings and

"You just don't usually get that kind of scale in New York City residences, except in some of the grander apartments on Park and Fifth avenues," notes Bierman, whose design strategies for Westreich and O'Keefe's home, highlighted below, are as clever as they are inspiring.

SUPERSIZE IT: Typical furniture would have looked puny amid the apartment's

REINVENTION

The bedroom's periwinkle upholstered headboard, curtains, and carpeting lend the room a cozy and peaceful air; the 17th-century portrait is by Willem van der Vliet. **Right:** Blue quartz lines the master bath, where Bierman created a storage niche for towels.



augmented them with complementary millwork made-to-order. "The architecture had character, and I didn't want to obliterate that," he says, adding that the new trims' traditional profiles "help mitigate the strict lines of the modern furnishings."

MADE IN THE SHADE: Though he gave each room a distinctive color scheme, Bierman stuck to palettes that play well together. Earth tones warm the living room, and the adjoining library is high-gloss red (including the ceiling); the bedroom is a vivid periwinkle, and blue quartz lines the en suite bath. The tonal values are balanced, he says, "so going from room to room isn't jarring."

DOUBLE DUTY: Bierman devised a cocktail table with a hidden mechanism that raises the top to dining height when needed. Westreich eats out most evenings, the designer says, so a dedicated dining area "would have been largely dead space."

A CUSTOM FIT: The living room's pinch-pleated silk-taffeta curtains are

"a throwback to what you might see in a classic uptown residence," Bierman says, "not what most people would use in a Chelsea loft." Additionally, their cinnamon hue, echoed in the room's vast velvety carpet, helps establish a warm, welcoming atmosphere.

SMOOTH MOVE: Despite being completely open to the living room, the supersleek kitchen is notably discreet thanks to taupe-lacquer panels that conceal the refrigerator, dishwasher, and range hood as well as a small-appliance cabinet.

WORKING ORDER: The 19-foot-long kitchen island, which features an ipe-wood base topped with polished Sequoia Brown marble, does more than merely provide abundant working and serving space for caterers. It also acts as a divider between the kitchen and the living room.

SOFT SELL: Bierman emphasized the master bedroom's cocooning qualities through the lavish use of fabrics, extending the channel-quilted headboard almost to the



ceiling and then curtaining the flanking windows with sumptuous silk panels. The designer also laid down a plush carpet that matches the walls, ceiling, and upholstery to reinforce the effect.

RACING STRIPES: Stretching wall to wall and nearly reaching the ceiling, the library's lustrous red-lacquer shelves transform Westreich's hundreds of books into a graphic horizontal element that "makes a modern statement," says Bierman, putting a fresh twist on the traditional study. The room also has an adjacent bath so it can function as a guest suite.

KEEPING IT CLEAN: In many of the rooms, the designer painted moldings, doors, and window frames and sashes with the wall color he had selected. It is a visual trick that keeps the architectural interruptions to a minimum.

BATHING BEAUTY: "Every client of mine wants a towel within easy reach of the shower," Bierman says. At the Westreich-O'Keefe apartment, the master bath goes one better, offering hooks as well as inset shelves for stowing white towels and decorative objects inside the shower stall. Even though it is equipped with multiple showerheads, the nearly ten-foot-wide quartz-lined shower is so spacious that the shelves don't get wet. —TIM MCKEOUGH