

APARTMENT LIFE: Smart Ideas for Small Spaces

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*Refined Elegance
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Apartment, p.118*

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Easy Modern

In a room dominated by pieces as important as a Morris Louis painting and a Roy Lichtenstein sculpture, furniture needs a lot of presence. Designer Judi Male (opposite, sitting on a *String* chair from Leolux in a guest bedroom) curated a collage of furniture that includes a Vladimir Kagan *Serpentine* sofa, a vintage red-upholstered chair by Garouste & Bonetti, a pair of stainless steel armchairs by Jacques Charpentier, a bronze Philip Laverne coffee table and a side table by Maria Pergay.





Designed for Art

Coordinating a collection of contemporary art and vintage midcentury furniture, *Miami* designer Judi Male created a singular penthouse that's as much a home as a showcase.



Judi

Male, one of the two principals in Miami's Male-Cahlin Design Partners, was at a dinner party one night when a guest mentioned that he and his wife had just bought a 1949 Vladimir Kagan *Serpentine* sofa. Male, who had an avid interest in the period, knew the piece. Fortuitously, her dinner companions were looking for a designer for the two-story penthouse they had just bought in a high-rise community that is located on a spectacular spot on the edge of Biscayne Bay with a view east to the Atlantic.

The Kagan sofa was just the beginning of the story for Male and her clients, whose interest in important contemporary furniture soon burgeoned into a passion for painting and sculpture. The result: a collection that now boasts pieces by Frank Stella, Robert Motherwell, Helen Frankenthaler and Sol LeWitt, among others.

Back in Michigan, the clients had traditional 18th- and 19th-century English and French furniture. When they first moved to Florida, to a townhouse in Miami, they progressed to European art

deco. But somehow a brand-new penthouse seemed to the empty-nesters a perfect venue for a switch to the contemporary—or, perhaps, the “vintage contemporary.”

With Male as their designated designer, the energetic clients began their quest, one that included trips through the annual Art Basel/Miami Beach exhibitions to look at both art and rare furniture. Further, the homeowners had Male poring through auction catalogs and studying photos of furniture to find just the right fit. “It was a wonderful learning experience for all of us,” says Male.

||| This page: A Helen Frankenthaler painting sets the tone in a seating area that features a psychedelic Pierre Paulin chair, a pair of *Unicorn* chairs by Vladimir Kagan and a Maria Pergay coffee table; the sculpture on the floor is by Sol LeWitt. Opposite: The homeowners enjoy a bar designed by Male; the custom barstools are by Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz. Sculptures are by Anish Kapoor (hanging) and Michael Vasquez.

PRODUCED BY LINDA O'KEEFE AND NISI BERRYMAN. PHOTOGRAPHS BY KEN HAYDEN. WRITTEN BY BETH DUNLOP.







Knowing

that the apartment itself needed to be spare, Male conceived an understated setting for furniture and art. “Really,” she says, “I designed the background and tried to make the rooms an organic part of this blooming collection. For me, the basic idea was to hear what they wanted their home to be. I started with a blank slate.” The goal, however, was not just to create a stage set for the artifacts but to do so in a way that made this a home, arranging comfortable seating areas both for entertaining and for quiet nights spent alone.

The couple began to build a solid collection of furniture: more Kagan, of course, and, joining him, pieces by such designers as Mira Nakashima, Pierre Paulin, Maria Pergay and Jacques Charpentier. Most of it, along with some of the major artworks, was bought at auction after considerable study and thought. “We never buy anything unless we both agree on it,” says the wife.

To help with the job, Male assembled a team of consultants

including architect Ray Fowler and lighting consultant Greg Friedheim. When you live with art, says Male, “lighting becomes very important, and as the art is moved, we go back and tweak the lighting.” For furniture advice, the owners relied, too, on New York-based antiques dealer Anthony DeLorenzo. They also became good students of the contemporary art scene and patrons of the nationally regarded Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami. That latter affiliation led them to discover artists who began to emerge in Miami in the 1990s; they now have two pieces, for example, by 29-year-old Florida native Bhakti Baxter.

Above: The dining room is home to a handmade wood-slab table by Mira Nakashima (daughter of George) and six Vladimir Kagan Lucite-legged chairs in the original Jack Lenor Larsen fabric. Reproduction Serge Mouille pendants are from Guéridon; art is by (from left) Robert Motherwell, Susan Rothenberg and Bhakti Baxter. Opposite: A Claes Oldenberg sculpture sits at the foot of the dramatic white-ash staircase.





Midwesterners

at heart, the owners of the penthouse are gregarious and naturally gracious, sharing their apartment with a wide circle of friends and family at the holidays and opening it to an occasional fundraiser. They have three grown children, only one of whom lives in Miami, so guest bedrooms were a necessity.

So too were spaces to accommodate their particular interests. She is a quilter of considerable accomplishment, though to hear her tell it, she sews. He is a dentist turned manufacturer who loves tools and has a fully equipped tool room that many homeowners would envy. He spends much of each day working in his office, which has a command-post position in the loftlike second floor at the top of the apartment's remarkable stairs.

With its tension-stretched steel cable railing, the stairway leading to the second floor is in its own way a work of art. It is austere and minimal, yet it has a sculptural presence—a key goal of its design—

and provides a strong geometric counterpoint, and a sense of orientation, within the more free-flowing apartment.

Indeed, the juxtaposition of the fluid and the angular is a continuing theme throughout the apartment. In the living room, a custom shag rug—it's essentially kidney-shaped—reinforces the biomorphic form of the Kagan sofa that started it all, and the furniture that is anchored by the cast-bronze coffee table by Philip Laverne embellishes the idea. A dramatic, if small, side table by Maria Pergay, an upholstered chair by Garouste & Bonetti and two Jacques Charpentier side chairs complete the seating ensemble.

This page: The den at the west end of the apartment includes a Della Robbia sofa, a vintage Vladimir Kagan lounge, a custom *Fiori di Carta* rug from the Rug Company and a Mira Nakashima table as well as a Curtis Jere *Crane* lamp and art by Bhakti Baxter. The organic-shaped shelf is topped in quartz. Opposite: The husband's tool room has custom cabinetry and a rolling stool with a motorcycle seat.



What the Pros Know

If you are creating a space for a significant collection, it's important not to compete with the objects on view, be they paintings, sculptures or furniture. "Because of the organic, flowing quality of the space, I didn't want wood or a grid of tiles on the floor," says Judi Male. To this end, she chose polished stained concrete for the floors—an application that would be normal in a gallery but that seems daring in the kind of penthouse where marble might be more expected. It is, however, a perfect foil for the art. "In order to get that wonderful smooth feel, you must pour a topping slab," says Male. Once cured, the concrete is then stained to get a chemical reaction with the color variations attained by the mix of minerals in the stain. "It really is a work of art," says Male. Here, the color choice was a rich brown that looks like tortoiseshell. Once the staining process is complete, the floor can be sealed, polished, waxed to a sheen. Sometimes, for example in art galleries seeking a more industrial look, the concrete is left with a matte finish, but more often, the goal is luster.

The master

suite was rearranged to take advantage of the stunning views across the bay to the ocean. Like the rest of the apartment, the bedroom is minimal, the better to feature additional highlights from the collections. "Art needs to speak," says the husband. "When the setting is cluttered, it's hard to appreciate any one piece. It all competes, if only subliminally."

A painting by Frank Stella hangs above a table by Mira Nakashima—she is now the creative force behind the design studio that bears the name of her late father, the legendary George Nakashima. "We started to collect the father," says the owner, "but we really grew to love Mira's work." Like true collectors, these homeowners are always moving forward, eager to learn and appreciate; thus, little in this apartment reflects the past—although there are needlepoint pillows, a handmade quilt and the highlights of a once-larger collection of martini sets. One vestige of prior houses shows up in the master bath: two Venetian mirrors, "really wonderful pieces," says Male. They hang over almost austere modern fixtures.

For Male, the process of design is a journey, and it's one she does not take alone. "That's the joy of it," she says. Her academic and professional grounding in art history and in furniture history meant that working with avid and enthusiastic collectors was all the more stimulating and pleasurable. "We made it happen together. It was really that old cliché—a labor of love for all of us." 🍷

See Resources, last pages.

||| This page (from top): A Vladimir Kagan lounge and a Mira Nakashima side table join a Frank Stella painting in one corner of the master bedroom; displayed on white-ash shelving are two prized "souvenirs": a patchwork Prada bag and shoes that the wife calls her "ruby red slippers." ||| Opposite: The master bath, with its freestanding tub by Philippe Starck for Duravit and *Aquagrande* sink from Lacava.



