

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF INTERIOR DESIGN

MARCH 2002



**GEORGIA O'KEEFE'S**  
GHOST RANCH



# Rooms. with a View

WHEN VISTA BECOMES THE DICTATE FOR DESIGN

Architecture by Marvin Herman & Associates/Interior Design by Michael La Rocca  
Text by Penelope Rowlands/Photography by Tony Soluri



"This is an apartment for entertaining," Michael La Rocca says of a Chicago residence he and architect Marvin Herman designed. ABOVE: The entrance hall, with its simple lines and rich textures, sets the tone for the rest of the apartment. "The diamond paneling brings the whole space to life," La Rocca notes.

The designer aimed to "fuse the contemporary character of the building with the clients' interest in Neoclassicism." LEFT: A circa 1928 Chana Orloff sculpture, *Madame Harari*, overlooks the L-shaped living room, which has southern and western exposures. Jim Thompson drapery fabric; custom rug by Hokanson.

It began with a view—a dreamy, wide-angled one that seemed to take in the whole of Chicago, from its famed skyscrapers to that matchless, ever-changing lake. When the clients first saw their future home—two combined apartments high up in the building known as Water Tower Place—"it was down to the bare walls," the husband recalls. But the vista was there, twinkling beyond the plasterboard and exposed concrete. Its hyp-

notic beauty dictated the residence's design.

"The clients' first request was to be able to see this view when they walked in the front door," says Chicago-based architect Marvin Herman. The clients also hoped to glimpse it—who wouldn't?—from almost every other room.

Herman, working with project architect Michael Vanderpoel, obliged with a layout that incorporates "a 270-degree exposure throughout all the public rooms, in-



cluding the living room, library and dining room.” For a couple who entertain frequently, he created an elegantly proportioned, easy-flowing layout. “They wanted all of the rooms to interconnect,” says Herman, “with no isolated spaces.”

When they commissioned their new residence, the clients were, as Herman says, “two loving newlyweds who had found each other later in life.” At an age when many people have only retirement in mind, this pair resolved to start anew, giving up the furnishings they had lived with all their lives, right down to the glassware. To help replenish their furnishings, the

couple enlisted New York-based interior designer Michael La Rocca, whom they found by way of another Chicago apartment he had done. “The detail work was just incredible,” the wife remembers.

So it is here, where sumptuous materials—makore-wood paneling, French limestone, herringbone-patterned oak floors—were used to create an exquisite haven in the sky. “The idea was to do an apartment that had an opulence to it, a luxury, but that also had a tailored quality,” the designer says.

Tailored, however, does not mean dull. La Rocca conceived the rooms as a series of “surprising spaces.” One

of the first areas you encounter—a small yet somehow outsize entrance—seems the most astonishing of all. The intricate, diamond-patterned paneling had been a long-held dream of the designer’s ever since he saw a circa 1930 photograph of a room with similar paneling. “I thought, What a wonderful idea! But I hadn’t had the opportunity to try it until now,” says La Rocca. Besides its obvious aesthetic appeal, the surface has a practical function: “It brings in light from adjoining rooms,” he explains, “and expands the space dramatically.” The contrasting floor, of pale limestone with a steel inlay, on-

ABOVE: The living room’s windows frame sweeping views. The mahogany sewing table and the Louis XV ebony side table, which flank the sofa, are from Bernd Goeckler, as are the French Neoclassical urn lamps and the Russian sewing table. A parchment-covered low table complements the traditional elements.

OPPOSITE: “The dining room ceiling was devised to give the illusion of more height and to take advantage of its long and narrow proportions,” says La Rocca. The two round Louis XVI mahogany tables are frequently joined for large gatherings. Cream silk damask wallcovering from Old World Weavers.



