

On the Grid

Crisp lines and artful angles turn two condos in a Mies van der Rohe high-rise into one big, beautifully minimalist home

BY LISA CREGAN

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In the open-plan living area, a blown-up sketch of Pamela Lamaster-Millett's first drawing for the space hangs next to the husband's "Mona Lisa" rendered in squares of Benjamin Moore colors to mimic paint chips. The strand-woven bamboo wall to the left encloses the powder room.

SIZE 2,800 square feet

TYPE Condominium

LOCATION Lake View

Minimalism does not take kindly to people's "stuff." Though two empty nesters loved the clean lines of the space they'd found high in a Lake View tower designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, they loved their stuff more.

The couple had just sold their house in leafy Oak Park and were looking forward to a new life in the city. Their new place was actually a merged unit, the result of combining two adjacent 1,400-square-foot apartments, so a gut rehab was in order.

"It was intimidating at first," admits Pamela Lamaster-Millett, a principal in the Chicago firm Searl Lamaster Howe Architects, who worried about meeting her clients' twin directives—to be as green as possible and to reference Mies without being a slave to his dogma. "Could we be creative enough but not too creative?"

Lamaster-Millett's first move was a shocker for any strict Miesian. Taking the visual point where the apartment's lake vista hands off to city skyline, she slashed a stylistic diagonal right through the heart of Mies's right-angled box. The southern half of the apartment responds to the tangled greenery below in Lincoln Park, offsetting nature's effusiveness with hard materials such as a tile floor made from recycled stone in the living room and crisp rust-colored laminate cabinets in the kitchen.

To the northwest, where the apartment overlooks a flat gray cityscape, the architect chose warmer natural materials—cork tile, wood, and strand-woven bamboo walls—to take the chill off the metropolitan tundra.

Last came the "stuff" issue. Lamaster-Millett made walls out of the stacks of art and philosophy books dear to her clients. Many of the rooms are delineated by tall sets of shelves with clear EcoResin backs that allow light to reach the apartment's interior. "It looks like wallpaper, but it's not," the husband says.

Lamaster-Millett says she was careful to honor Mies's aesthetic, but she also wanted the place to be "livable, human, and contemporary." Her clients are delighted. "I find modernism severe," says the husband. "This is more playful with color and ornament. This is the first time I've lived in a high-rise, but very early on I felt it was home."

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Architecture: Searl Lamaster Howe Architects, 500 N. Dearborn St., 312-251-9200, searlarch.com. **Paint:** American Pride, Greenmaker Supply, 2500 N. Pulaski Rd., 773-384-7500. **Millwork:** Formaldehyde-free Baltic birch plywood, C. M. Sell Woodwork, Wauconda, 847-526-3627, cmsellwoodwork.com. **Laminate woodwork faces:** Abet Laminati, abetlaminati.com. **Bamboo walls:** Strand bamboo, Smith & Fong, 866-835-9859, plyboo.com. **Door hardware:** Cast aluminum, FSB, fsb.de. **Living room:** Sofa, Ligne Roset, 440 N. Wells St., 312-222-9300, ligne-roset.com. Gray chair, Capellini, Luminaire, 301 W. Superior St., 312-664-9582, luminaire.com. Eames stool, Herman Miller, Merchandise Mart. Floor, Fritz Tile, fritztile.com. Lighting, T5 fluorescents. **Kitchen:** Counters, Caesarstone, caesarstoneus.com. Stainless steel faucets, Hansgrohe, hansgrohe-usa.com. **TV room:** Chair, Dania, daniafurniture.com. Tile floor, Fritz Tile. Dark floor, cork tile, Habitus, habitusnyc.com. **Master bath:** Shower, tub, and sinks, Concrete Age Artworks, 1932 S. Halsted St., 312-226-3542, concreteageartworks.com. Stainless steel faucets, Hansgrohe.

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A view of the apartment, taken from the sister building next door, showcases one of Mies's signature moves—the curtain wall of windows.

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On the Grid

In the media area, the white tile floor changes to rich cork tile that extends into the master bedroom, warming up the private spaces.

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On the Grid

A Ligne Roset sofa provides a bold splash of orange in the living room; the geometric pattern of the floor tiles is a riff on Miesian rectangles.

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Bookcases line the entry hall. Straight ahead, some books in the wife's office are visible through the Eco-Resin backing on the shelves.

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Touches of blue in the wife's office echo the hue of the water in the fountain.

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The kitchen evokes a lacquered Japanese bento box, with burnt-orange laminate on the outside and white laminate inside. Counters are CaesarStone; Bosch appliances rated for their high energy-efficiency.

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