The clock tower penthouse renovation presented a unique challenge of transforming an otherwise blank canvas into an eclectic and architecturally stimulating vacation home for Jean Michele, Creative Director of Cirque Du Soleil, his aerialist girlfriend and two young daughters.

My initial design direction was to problem solve. A necessary component and primary challenge was to propose a solution for impromptu aerial performances within the clock tower, and I wanted Michelle to be able to reach the upper floors on a whim for these special acts. I made this possible by disguising a “ladder” as an architectural detail on the two main columns within the apartment—wrapping them in a bronze, cage like formation, and building the columns up to the third floor. I chose to utilize the open area above the living space by knocking out the walls that surrounded it on the second floor and transforming the space into a wrap around balcony for performance viewing. This balcony also doubles as a gallery space for Michelle’s very special collection of fine art. When it came to the necessary need for a “landing pad,” I chose to utilize a detachable netting that is also multifunctional in its purpose—acting as a floor hammock where Michele and his family can lounge and relax. As a universal designer, all areas and restrooms within the apartment are also ADA accessible, as it is of the utmost importance that all guests of Michele’s feel welcome in his home.

Michele is a self-proclaimed minimalist whose aesthetic is highly refined yet unapologetically idiosyncratic. Eccentric and chic, Michele adores the juxtaposition of textures, materiality and styles. My design direction was to utilize a mix of vintage, contemporary and industrial aesthetics to create a dynamic and harmonious tension that exists between different styles and time periods. In terms of materiality, I went with a classic French aesthetic of chevron patterned wood flooring and traditional wall/ceiling moldings as the apartments foundation. The history of the clock tower also had a significant role in my design. Originally a paper and box factory, I utilized industrial, “steam-punk” elements such as raw concrete and metal detailing. Geometric shapes and forms are seen throughout the apartment as a playful nod to the circus, along with whimsical lighting fixtures. These two design elements (geometrical/industrial) were primarily utilized when selecting from Michele’s art and furnishings collection.

In my research, I visited the Metropolitan Museum as well as the Carlton Hobbs gallery in NYC where certain design details previously mentioned were inspired from, such as French Neoclassical elements like gilding, moldings, marble, patterned wood flooring and muted color palettes. In terms of lighting, being that the first floor of the apartment possesses windows on all four sides, I wanted to design window treatments that were as unique as the location itself. Geometric, stained glass screens that can cast colorful shadows within the space are utilized on all smaller windows, while 14” pivoting bronze screens are used to treat the four marvelous clocks. My goal was to make Michele’s whimsical vision come to life, and with that, a truly unique home was born.
M O O D . B O A R D

M A T E R I A L I T Y . I N S P I R A T I O N

- Color scheme inspired by Joan Miro
- Industrial/"steam punk" aesthetic
- Geometric shapes/forms

C L I E N T

- The Michele Family

J e a n
A d e l e
M a r g a r e t
& A m é l i e

S I T E - D u m b o C l o c k T o w e r

- Originally the Gair Factory in the 19th century & the largest manufacturer of boxes in the U.S.
- 1 Main Street was the tallest reinforced concrete building in the world when built

S I T E V I S I T S

- The juxtaposition of time periods/styles
- Wall moldings and gilded mirrors
- Subdued color palettes

C A R L T O N H O B B S  T H E M E T R O P O L I T A N M U S E U M

R Q 9 A
FLOOR. 1

formal living room

pivot bronze screens

stained glass screens

window treatments

kitchen