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DEMOGRAPHION

**DYNAMICS**

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a ho-hum '70s high-rise.*

**What do you get when the dust settles?  
A dramatic style statement  
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BY LISA SKOLNIK  
TRIBUNE PHOTOS BY BILL HOGAN



Homeowner Casey Penry enjoys a spectacular city view from his terrace. He and designer Lukas Machnik kept the living room clean-lined and created drama by working within a limited color palette. Parisian floor lamps add height against a low-slung sofa.

# Demolition Dynamics

*Two designers renovate a ho-hum '70s high-rise. What do you get when the dust settles? A dramatic style statement like no other*

September 13, 2009 | BY LISA SKOLNIK

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Casey Penry thought he had an understanding with his longtime partner, designer Lukas Machnik. After much good-natured badgering, he had agreed to buy the tired, 1970s-era apartment Machnik had found for him. But on one condition - that he could move in and put off renovation until his life got a little less frenetic. Machnik nodded sympathetically and got right to work -- with a sledgehammer.

Let's just say they have an interesting dynamic.

"I told him I wanted to gut it ... but later," relates Penry with a pained laugh, "The next day I came over, and Lukas had made me an open kitchen."

"It was the only way," Machnik says firmly. "It was disgusting. Tiny rooms, closed off from the view, shag carpeting, red and yellow walls and a French country kitchen."

Penry admits he wasn't too thrilled at the time, "but now I see that he could see the future."

"Yes. I could see all the walls coming down!" laughs Machnik, who went on to reconfigure the entire apartment. "It became a full-out gut job," he admits.

Of course this cosmopolite's dream of an apartment didn't emerge helter-skelter from the mind of a demo-mad dervish; German-born Machnik has serious design industry credentials. He's a partner in the ahead-of-the-curve River North interiors showroom Florense (whose fans know Machnik is usually behind its sprightliest offerings).

Penry is a design powerhouse in his own right. A certified lighting consultant, owner of Glow Contract Lighting and a protege of Lightology founder Greg Kay, Penry is known for meticulously thoughtful lighting designs in residential and corporate projects all over Chicago. He and Machnik have a long history together, so Penry

knows little domestic surprises such as returning from work to find all his furniture rearranged are just part of Machnik's charm. Deciding he'd make lemonade from Machnik's sledgehammered lemons, Penry took advantage of the open walls and ceilings to work out an intricate illumination scheme that would complement the apartment's spectacular skyline views. "The project really became his playground," says Machnik with a smile.

Their individual obsessions sated, the two couldn't be happier with the newly open space, an apartment that feels like some swank penthouse perched on the edge of a satellite. "I wanted a handsome masculine place," says Penry of his home's clean Spartan look. "I hate the word pretty."

"And I hate the word cute," adds Machnik. Machnik banished cute from the get-go by smashing through walls to create a one-bedroom's version of a grand foyer: a white-walled space adorned with black and white art and sculpture.

Visitors walk next into an open-plan living room /dining room/kitchen swathed in unapologetically matte black, a color Machnik calls charcoal. It's an envelope with such depth that the gold tufted leather sofa literally glows like a full moon in a starless sky.

"I don't generally like leather sofas, but the color of this one drew me in," says Machnik of the showstopping upholstery. "This has that sexy James Bond look."

The George Jetson-style, white lacquer bubble chairs are the spoils of one of Machnik's frequent antique store raids. They somehow found their way into the mix despite strenuous protests from Penry.

"Lukas showed me a photo of these crazy chairs, and I said, 'No!'" recalls Penry. (This is an ongoing plotline.) The egg-cup-shaped Italian chairs showed up anyway, and Penry acknowledges now that they help relax all the straight lines. "I also have to admit they're the most damn comfortable chairs ever!"

With two strong and capable personalities laser-focused on such a small space it's not surprising that no detail has been left untended. Machnik has tightly edited the selection of books to match the room's color palette. All the better to show off Penry's wizardry.

"It's amazing the kinds of things Casey can do with light and shadow," says Machnik. "The lighting

pulls your eye away from the television to highlight the more interesting visuals on the shelves. You can't believe how much richness that brings to a room."

In the bedroom, Machnik points out dark bronze walls and an ergonomic chaise covered in black cowhide where Penry can stretch out and contemplate the twinkling lights gliding into O'Hare. "I think of the finished apartment as a good glass of scotch and a cigar," says Machnik.

"Lukas has this magic that sets him apart; he can take anything and make a storybook," says Penry, who reports there's only one thing left from his pre-Machnik decor. "When we first met, Lukas vetoed everything in my apartment. All except for this Buddha here in the dining room. He survived, and now he watches over this place."

"It's Casey's lucky charm," says Machnik. And an appropriate one. As the wise Buddha pointed out, all things are impermanent. Including apartment walls.

## MACHNIK & PENRY'S STYLE NOTES

### **Embrace deep color**

Casey Penry likes "a handsome masculine" look, so walls in his west-facing apartment were painted black. Not even blinding late afternoon sun can diminish the mood.

### **Get the lighting right**

The interplay of light and shadow is Penry's obsession as well as his profession. The apartment's lighting is fanatically calibrated to complement furnishings, art and even the inhabitant's skin tones.

### **Create drama in the foyer**

In Lukas Machnik's opinion, foyers should always be "art galleries." Walls are painted Benjamin Moore Decorator's White, and even Penry's hats and gloves aren't permitted to interfere with the clean slate. Machnik designed a floating console with a flip-down front to store everyday essentials.