

# CS Interiors



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## Look Sharp

A renovated Bucktown home makes it hip to be rectangular.

By Amalie Drury | Photography by Tony Soluri

Right angles rule in Chicago designer Lukas Machnik's latest project, the renovation of a three-story, single-family Bucktown home that was built in 2002. Lanky floor lamps jut from behind squared-off couches; flames flicker inside a long, low, horizontal cutout of a fireplace; thinly sliced steps create sharp windowed views as one ascends the dark-stained staircase. The house was a solid construction job with good bones, and its location just a half block off buzzing Damen Avenue was a plus. But it needed creative layout adjustments to suit Machnik's client, a young professional who's currently not married but wanted to make the house—his first venture into home ownership outside of high-rise living—family-ready.

### LIGHT BRIGHT

Machnik says the room was designed around the vintage '70s pivot lamp, Giraffa, designed by Angelo Brotto for Esperia. "I fell in love with this lamp years ago when I saw it in Tom Ford's book elegantly pivoting over a long console table in his Paris apartment. From that time I was on a mission to find it." He found one at Pavilion.









Left: Looking down a stark, minimal hallway, John Richter's all-absorbing photograph of a forest in Aspen injects a beautiful shot of color and life into the space. Right: The art installation by Lonney White III hovers over the chaise lounge and two Timeless chairs, all by Antonio Citterio for Flexform. The cowhide rug is designed by Machnik.



"We didn't come in and rip the house apart; we went through a painstaking planning process," says Machnik, who believes the result is a space that feels like brand-new construction, as if the new owner is the first to live there. "It's always a great scenario to have a client who gives you carte blanche."

The owner says he found Machnik through word of mouth after reviewing the portfolios of seven other designers. "I wanted a home that could be contemporary but functional, and wouldn't feel sterile, like I was living

in a museum," he says. After Machnik came over for a walkthrough, it became clear their ideas for the space meshed. "His vision sounded like exactly the kind of direction I was looking for."

The house feels, above all, masculine. Nearly every wall is painted a moody charcoal gray. It's difficult to walk through the front door and not immediately focus on the dining room's dominant art piece, two giant, pointed tusks carved from walnut by Ty Best of Caste Design and facing off as if braced for battle against a



stormy sky. The living room fireplace is encased in a solid piece of black marble so subtle and smooth you have to touch it to realize it's stone; when you do, the slab gives the sensation of being both cool and hot at the same time. With its huge movie screen, full bar, 1920s film projector and massive couch, the basement media room is a sports fan's dream. Five iPads throughout the house can control almost anything: One touch brings a flat-screen TV up from behind its hiding spot on the first floor; another press dims the trimless can lights meticulously placed by Machnik to bring warmth and contrast to dark surfaces. "Remember how it used to be when you were entertaining, and in order to set the mood you'd have to run around flipping a hundred switches?" says Machnik. "Not anymore. And this kind of smart technology isn't just about keeping up with the times; it's not out of the ordinary anymore. It's reality."

Softening the man-cave effect, though, are surprising touches of richness and texture. "I noticed that those things with an element of nature, an organic feel, are very attractive to him," says Machnik of his client, whose large family now uses the house as their home base when visiting Chicago. Steal a glance inside the dome-shaped Marcel Wanders lamp over the dining room table and you'll catch a glimpse of a "Skygarden" flower pattern, inspired by an intricate Parisian ceiling. There are sinuous leather sling chairs; tables and consoles made from knobby, character-loaded slabs of wood; and, upstairs, glossy art photographs of trees with startlingly green leaves to break the color palette.

The *pièce de résistance*, however, is a 26-foot-tall artwork by Chicago artist Lonney White, whom Machnik introduced to the owner. White was brought in to help meet a visual challenge being presented by a 30-foot wall that rises from the first floor through

Above: In the dining room, the matte black wall gets a dose of high-gloss glamour with the table by Antonio Citterio for MaxAlto. The antler tabletop creation is by Lonney White, and the hand-carved ebonized walnut tusks suspended in a steel armature are by Caste. Opposite page: Beyond the oversized Buddha statue, you can catch a glimpse of the serene, simple kitchen, outfitted in white matte lacquer, clean lines and carrera marble.









“At first, this palette of neutrals gives an overall minimal statement. But look closer, and your eye will be rewarded,” explains Machnik.

the second floor at the back of the house, and a piece commissioned specifically for the spot seemed the only solution. His sole direction to the artist, says the homeowner, was “No more black.”

“From the beginning he really grasped my work, and he had a level of trust and confidence in me that’s rare—a lot of clients like to interject with their own ideas and concepts, which can be very limiting,” says White of the client. “He really let me go at it.” White produced a series of five encaustic paintings—creamy, undulating surfaces drizzled with splashes of more

than 150 pounds of molten metal which, when dried in place and seen from across the room, have the sparkle of pyrite—framed in hundreds of pounds of solid iron and hung like loosely adjoining puzzle pieces.

The look of the grouping is long and lean, clean-lined and fresh—a lot of sharp corners doing their best to rein in unexpected bursts of exuberance. The more you look at it, the more fitting an analogy it seems for the entire home. “That’s true,” agrees Machnik. “At first, this palette of neutrals gives an overall minimal statement. But look closer, and your eye will be rewarded.” ■

Above: The vintage movie projector is from the '20s or '30s and comes from a movie studio originally started by Charlie Chaplin and Joan Crawford. Opposite page: Every piece of furniture in the media room screams comfort, including the hanging, knit Matt lamps by Ilot Illov. A few of the black square tiles on the back wall open to reveal a hidden bar.