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Gray Gardens

Three levels, one color and sky-high design transform an outdoor Bucktown bachelor pad into a sexy, monochromatic space for all seasons **By Kate Templin | Photography by Bob Coscarelli**

Forget wicker rockers, wrought iron lanterns and a smattering of geranium-filled flowerpots. When creating a tri-level rooftop lounge/open-air dining space/sundeck in Bucktown, Chicago designer Lukas Machnik took his high-design sensibility and translated it into the great outdoors, bringing in a collection of sexy furniture by the likes of Marcel Wanders and Patricia Urquiola, and let-it-be landscaping by Jayson Home & Garden. To set it

all off at its flattering finest, Machnik added illuminated occasional seating and coffee tables, perfect for after-dark ambiance. The result: a decidedly Delano-meets-Donald Judd aesthetic with nary a kitschy stripe or floral print to be found. And those bright, summery colors that usually populate a patio? They didn't stand a chance.

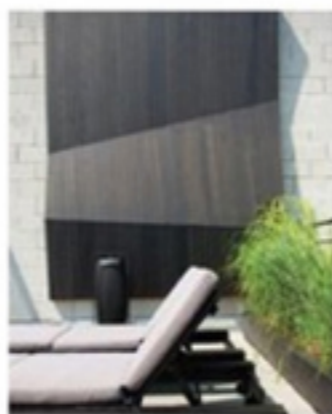
"By using shades of gray, you really highlight the green grasses and leaves," says Machnik, a Polish-born minimalist whose love of Mies van der Rohe brought him to Chicago in 2002. "And when nothing's popping out, it's more serene and much sexier."

The first step to sexy was creating a sense of privacy on the three decks, each of which stands close enough to the homes on either side that sharing a cocktail with neighbors wouldn't require an invitation, just a slight stretch. "On each of the rooftop decks, you could reach out and touch your neighbor. Space was a challenge," Machnik says of the project for a 20-something trader who desired a modern, minimalist, party-ready space. To achieve that

urban-retreat feel on the first deck, a dining and entertaining space, Machnik commissioned a dramatic, 16-foot-tall duck-blind pergola—horizontal slats of ebony-stained wood that encase three sides of the 20-by-20-foot deck and serve the dual purposes of shielding the space from next-door neighbors as well as the sun. "The initial inspiration was the Delano," Machnik says of the South Beach hotel's Philippe Starck-designed poolside retreat, which, like Machnik's project, was conceived as an indoor room moved outside. "The philosophy is that it's not just a deck; it's outdoor living space. I'm using the same color palette and contemporary lines that we're using inside the house."

The bunker-like, exterior cinder blocks were painted in Machnik's signature charcoal gray ("It took years and lots of tests to finalize that shade," he says), the floors were covered with sandblasted concrete tile (lighter than a concrete pour, the weight of which the rooftop structure couldn't support), and the space was filled with sleek furniture pieces and planters from Zaha Hadid, Urquiola and Wanders. "It's moody, kind of depressing, but sexy," Machnik says of the shades-of-gray space.

While design was always top of mind, putting the "fun" in functionality was equally important. "My client loves to entertain, and the first deck will be primarily used as a massive dining room," Machnik says. A built-in Lutron system offers party-perfect lighting and sound at the touch of a button. Machnik designed and hand-built the 12-foot-long, Donald Judd-inspired slab **CONTINUED...**



SLAT HAPPY Above: Clean-lined West Elm lounge chairs under an angular, 12-foot wooden art installation of Machnik's own design. Left: Table and benches designed by Lukas Machnik.



Private cubes, tucked between weeping willows, are designed as make-out booths, should the need arise.

...CONTINUED table, which accommodates 10-plus, from reclaimed barnwood with Lonney H. White III (available at Pavilion). The lounge area will feature Hadid's lighted modular tables, which also act as additional seating. "They kind of look like mushrooms after the rain, sculptural but beautiful," Machnik says. "And when you sit on them, they're actually comfortable."

Urquiola's Canasta armchairs, oversized Fibrestone planters, five-foot-high polished-chrome torches—Machnik's take on a modern fire pit—and Jayson Home & Garden-designed, low-lying plant boxes filled with tall grasses fill out the first deck. "All the plant life is low maintenance," Machnik says. "I don't see my client watering or weeding, so we went for a more wild, less manicured, 'pretty, pretty' look."

Lighting was also extremely important to Machnik ("After all, you spend 90 percent of your time at home at night"), who brought in illuminated coffee tables, planters and an organic, wicker-weave fixture to hang over the dining table. "This is a sharp-angled, clean-lined space, but I thought it was important to play around with organic elements that add softness while keeping everything very masculine," he says.

And make no mistake about it: This is a manly

space—from the private cubes tucked between weeping willows and designed to act as make-out booths, if the need should arise, to the no-wimps-allowed, dramatic spiral staircase that connects the first deck to the second. Machnik hopes his client will use it often. "It was important that each deck had its own purpose. Otherwise, he'd probably end up using only one," Machnik says. "The challenge is they're all separated, so how do you create a functional flow? I introduced elements on each deck that will force him to use one or the other for dining, tanning, lounging, entertaining... It gives him a lot of options without leaving any space unused."

The second-level deck's purpose: lounging, specifically on a black lacquered Hadid bench, Kartell plastic Bubble Club Chairs and CB2's Sawyer eucalyptus wood adirondacks, a sleek, sustainable and economical find at \$250 each. "I like to mix expensive and inexpensive, especially in an outdoor space," Machnik says. "Why spend \$3,000 on a chair that will be damaged in a year, when you can find a \$300 chair that looks so great?"

Design-wise, the second deck continues the gray theme with a concrete fire pit and coffee table from Luminaire and an eight-foot-tall piece of petrified wood. "It almost looks rotten because it has so many holes in it," Machnik says. "It makes a statement that this is an outdoor room." And the truly courageous (and hopefully sober) can brave a ladder up to the final deck, a massive, top-floor space lined with green grass and filled with simple loungers designed for sunbathing. Shockingly, Machnik ordered them in black and white. ■

STACKING THE DECK

A quartet of Sawyer chairs from CB2 create an intimate, clean-lined lounge area.