

\* KITCHEN AND BATH SPECIAL

# HOME

Chicago

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+ GARDEN

## Cool, Bright, Right

Luxe Penthouse in the Montgomery  
Taking a Bath with Nate Berkus  
Modern Redux on the Gold Coast





A photograph of a modern living room. In the foreground, a light-colored, possibly beige or cream, sofa with large, plush cushions is visible. The sofa is positioned in front of a large, multi-paned window that spans across the background. The window frames are light-colored, and the glass panes are clear, allowing bright light to fill the room. The floor is covered with a dark, textured rug that has a grid-like pattern. The overall aesthetic is clean, minimalist, and bright.

# HIGH DEFINITION

A bachelor's penthouse  
combines pure modernism with  
luxury on a grand scale

BY ELIZABETH BLACKWELL

A bank of 14 floor-to-ceiling windows floods the apartment with natural light and creates a sense of openness, enhanced by a neutral color scheme.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY NATHAN KIRKMAN  
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**RECIPE FOR A SOPHISTICATED BACHELOR PAD:** Start with a sprawling penthouse space in the 28-story Montgomery, in River North. Mix muscular materials—limestone, chiseled quartz, dark wood—with streamlined modern furniture. Add sweeping city views and a professional-caliber wine cellar.

The final ingredient? Trust.

"It was a challenging project," says the homeowner, Tom Steffanci, chief operating officer for a company that imports and exports luxury wines. "I really like a modern style with clean lines, open space, and a sense of tranquility. I also wanted my eye drawn to the view without the distraction of walls or too much furniture." But while he had a general idea of what he wanted, it was difficult to visualize how it would all come together. Steffanci entrusted his vision to designer





"There was no way to make this too modern for him," says designer Sacco of his client. A massive wall of chiseled quartz—complete with "green" fireplace—separates the living area from the master bedroom. The bold Pallucco light fixture adds drama to the dining area.



Joseph Sacco of JS Interiors Group, whose goal was to create a home that looked modern but not sterile. "Modernism and minimalism aren't the same thing," he says. "You shouldn't walk into someone's home and feel like you have to put on rubber gloves and a lab coat."

The raw, open space—with 13-foot ceilings and an entire wall of floor-to-ceiling windows—lent itself to grand plans. But starting with a blank slate required a leap of faith for Steffanci. "The challenge was to get him to understand the scale and perspective we were working with," says Sacco. "Some of the furniture looked huge

in the store, but you have to compete with the view."

To keep the open feel, Sacco designed room dividers that allow anyone standing in the central living and dining area to see through to the media room on one side and the master bedroom on the other. (Pocket doors of translucent glass can be pulled out to make the bedroom private when necessary.) "It feels like the entire house is open and accessible," says Steffanci. "People are invited to wander around, and I like that."

A massive nine-by-five-foot kitchen island, topped with Pietra Cardosa soapstone, bridges the gap between the kitchen and the





The homeowner, a wine connoisseur, enjoys this professional-caliber wine cellar just off the kitchen. Guests can gather inside for small tasting parties, or share a bottle in the open kitchen (opposite).



dining area. To make the kitchen fit aesthetically with the larger space, Sacco chose custom cabinets made of dark wenge wood from the Italian company Arclinea. Smooth steel handles lie flush with the surface, giving the cabinets a clean, polished look. Two ovens and a microwave are hidden under the island, with an integrated refrigerator and freezer drawers camouflaged behind the cabinetry. Open niches were added to make the tall bank of cabinets resemble display shelves in a living room or office. "It's more about looking at the art than seeing appliances," says Sacco.

In the dining area, another bank of Arclinea cabinets serves as both buffet and bar, complete with integrated fridge and ice drawers—no need to walk over to the kitchen to freshen up drinks. The zebrawood of the dining table is echoed in subtly striped fabric on the chairs, which were slipcovered for easy cleaning (a practical consideration in a home where red wine is often served). Overhead, Sacco chose a striking light fixture, by Pallucco, that reminded him of birds flying outside the windows.

**T**HE LIVING ROOM AREA was designed for conversation. "You can sit here and still be a part of what's going on in the kitchen," says Sacco. One side was left free of furniture to make the space feel welcoming to anyone entering the apartment. A dramatic wall of chiseled quartz surrounds a "green" fireplace that burns ethanol and doesn't give off any fumes. "Anyone else would hang art here," says Sacco, pointing to the spot above the fireplace. "I wanted to make the wall the art."

In the master bedroom, Sacco chose a low-slung bed, by the Italian company Molteni & C, that emphasizes the height of the room. A flat-screen television is mounted on the wall opposite the bed, where it can't be seen from the rest of the apartment (Sacco and Steffani didn't want electronics to be a focal point of the space). For storage, Sacco designed a "dressing triangle": a reach-in closet, a walk-in closet, and an island with shelves and drawers, all within a few feet of each other. The lights in the walk-in closet are on dimmers, "so it's still sexy," says Sacco.

The master bathroom continues themes found elsewhere in the home. Here, Arclinea cabinets like those used in the kitchen were







"It is not a museum," Tom Steffanci says. "It's comfortable and easy to live in. It wasn't designed with anyone else but me in mind."

built on a stainless steel frame. "The sink functions as a piece of furniture," says Sacco. Rectangular and square chrome handles were chosen for their crisp, modern look.

The media room—on the opposite side of the apartment from the master bedroom—has all the requisite amenities, including a 50-inch flat-screen TV, built-in surround sound, and a long sofa meant for sprawling. But while media rooms are often so soundproofed and lightproofed that they're cut off from the rest of the house, Sacco kept the space connected by not extending the room divider all the way to the wall. "It feels like a private room, but there are no doors, so you can circulate," he says.

The apartment's real conversation piece is the wine cellar, a





In the master bedroom, a low-to-the-floor platform bed emphasizes the room's high ceiling. The hanging bedside light fixture (detail below) was chosen for its resemblance to ice cubes—a nod to the homeowner's love of entertaining. A knobby fir-wood vase adds interest to an arrangement of personal items (opposite). The master bathroom (bottom) has the tranquil feel of a spa.



room off the kitchen with space for 2,000 bottles. Although the lighting is dim to protect the wines, large glass doors keep the space from feeling like a cellar. "You can have interaction with the kitchen," says Sacco, "but it faces away from the windows to block the light." A built-in sound system livens up wine-tasting parties.

Although his apartment is stylish enough to turn heads, Steffani says what he likes best about his home is that he feels relaxed there. "It is not a museum," he says. "It's comfortable and easy to live in. I think the simplicity, the clean lines, and the unobstructed views have a calming effect. It wasn't designed with anyone else but me in mind. I guess it's a unique space, but I love it." ■

*For resource information, see page 112.*