

NORTSHORE

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BY MARY MAGUIRE

Kitchens and bathrooms can be designed to suit any taste, whether it's a touch of Italy in Barrington or sleek modernism in downtown Chicago.

Living in a building designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe has its advantages. There's the prestige of inhabiting space designed by a world-renowned architect, as well as pleasingly simple architecture. The residential building he designed at 900 Lake Shore Drive, just steps away from the lake, is ideal for people who crave instant access to water activities, such as swimming and boating.

Hunter Henry embraced all these features four years ago when he and his wife, Elaine, purchased a two-bedroom condominium in the building. At the time, the couple planned to return to Chicago, but decided to test-drive the condo (and the city) on weekends before making a permanent move.

"We commuted from our home in Michigan for almost two years before plunging in," says Henry. In fact, the couple purchased the studio apartment next door with a plan to merge the two into one. Remodeling involved a complete overhaul of the kitchen and the master bathroom and took nearly a year from start to finish.

"Our goal was to create an open floor plan filled with natural light," says

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LIND OYAMA BRYAN



Henry, who handled much of the initial demolition on his own, including tearing down walls and dismantling the kitchen and bath, before enlisting Evanston architect Gregory Maire and Northbrook builder Andy Poticha of Design Construction Concepts to help.

A wall between the original galley kitchen and dining area was one of the first to go. A large island, complete with storage space and countertop seating, now divides the space. The sink, dishwasher, cook top and upper and lower cabinets line up against a wall, while the refrigerator hides behind teak paneling nearby. A thick black shelf rimming the kitchen's perimeter defines the space and hides a series of mood-creating puck lights.

The kitchen's southern exposure offers lots of natural light as well as views of nearby high rises, including a row of Mies van der Rohe-designed buildings. A mirror on the apartment's north wall, hanging over the kitchen sink, captures the light and appears to expand the room visually. The mirror was the architect's idea, says Hunter, who initially kiboshed any view that would show him rinsing dishes. "When I first saw it, I thought 'Oh no, the workers goofed; that's not supposed to be here.'" But after living with the mirror for a few hours, I loved it - it's a great touch."

Decorative tile on the backsplash is actually metal. "Easy clean-up," says Hunter. The countertops are made of boughton moor, a soft, porous stone that resembles slate. Because most upper cabinets were removed, dishes are stored in the island's rollout drawers.

Being open to ideas presented by the design team helped make the project special, says Hunter. The island, for example, is 6 inches higher than usual to give it a stronger presence in the approximately 30-foot-by-15-foot-room.

In an ode to Mies van der Rohe, the Henrys kept a simple, spare look, but only to a point. To inject some color and warmth, honey colored teak is used on the walls and cabinetry. Cork flooring (installed over concrete) adds comfort.

"We had a lot of flexibility in construction because there are no load-bearing walls within the apartment," says Poticha. The west wall of the kitchen, for example, is gently curved. "This project embraces Mies' boxy, minimalist approach, but at the same time this is a home so we were able to take a little creative license."

A string of lights hanging overhead mimics the outline of a boat's bow. So too does the kitchen island's curved edge, which sits directly below the lights. The design element is no coincidence; the Henrys are avid boaters.



Clean, pure lines define the master bathroom. Unexpected details include a glass countertop and a glass wall that is actually two panels of glass separated with a thin white laminate. It stands between the bathroom and master bedroom. "It's private, but still lets in light," says Hunter. This works well because the building's plumbing chase is located in the middle of the apartment, so the bathroom cannot have any windows.

The dual sinks are raised to reduce splashing. The cabinets are teak and the tiles around the shower are a deep green. Although the bath is now three times the size of the one that existed in the converted studio, the tub was removed to create more space.

Mies likely would have approved.