Outside the Box in Vancouver

A Designer Helps a Young Client Define Himself and His Surroundings in British Columbia

Interior Design by Patricia Gray
Text by Kelly Vencill Sanchez/After Photography by Roger Brooks

“Every single square inch of space had to be accounted for,” Patricia Gray says of the small Vancouver, British Columbia, apartment she designed for Kenin Louie. Lift: Sunning views draw visitors past the kitchen and into the living area. Michael Taylor sofa fabric. Top and above: Using rich materials, including rift-cut white oak, Gray transformed the living area.
As far back as she can remember, Patricia Gray was surround-ed by beautiful fabrics, colors and textures. Her mother worked as a costume designer in Vancouver, British Columbia, where the designer grew up. “I was always rearranging the house and helping her sew,” she recalls. “Every time we’d go to visit somebody’s home, I’d come back and draw it all—the floor plan, how the windows were, how the light came in.”

Her early lessons in design and detailing learned, Gray graduated from college with a degree in interior design and opened her own firm in Vancouver. Soon after, she traveled to Paris for a summer to study decorative arts and architectural history at Parsons School of Design. “I came back to Vancouver and interpreted what I’d learned there—the rich detailing and craftsmanship and the integrity of the architectural envelope, which is usually what I work on first. If the space isn’t right, nothing works. Then,” she adds with a

Paolo Rizzatto’s witty take on the wing chair forms the room’s centerpiece. “Most people would probably get one.”
"I wanted it to be about my life and not fall into a cookie-cutter style," Louie says.

View. So I started looking at it as a wonderful shell. My only given was the ceiling-to-floor height restriction.

Managing an eight-foot height restriction in any residence is an engineering challenge, but here, with a client who is six feet seven inches tall, every millimeter counted. "We did a lot of things that had never been done before," Gray explains. Their first contractor told them they wouldn't be able to accommodate the recessed pot lights, ductwork, sprinkler lines and soundproofing (in his free time, Louie flies to D J without a dropped ceiling). "I was determined to keep a seamless ceiling and focus the eye toward the view," says Gray. The second contractor, with whom she'd worked previously, helped her chart a new territory—moving the sprinkler, venting and mechanical systems to the party walls, installing soundproof drywall and installing two-and-a-half-inch recessed pot lights. "I was fixated on using timeless pot lights," Gray remembers. "It's a dryvaller's nightmare: They have to cut the holes out and finish them perfectly." She was continued on page 232.

Before and top: The bedroom and adjacent flex space can be separated via a pocket door, the track of which is recessed seamlessly into the ceiling and the floor. A 2005 bronze by Colin Kwok is on the bedside table. Telephone from Bang & Olufsen.

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Off the living area, Gray designed a flex zone that serves as an area to relax, play and watch the views. The master bath is on the left; the walk-in closet is in the center with doors that open to reveal a wall of mirrored cabinets below. A floating vanity and a wall of windows make the space feel airy and open. In the bedroom, a large window with a view of the city and harbor can be covered with sheer curtains, giving the master suite a fluid look and feel.

For Gray, to say that the apartment as it had been reconfigured didn't work is something of an understatement. "But," she says, "there was that..."