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ISSN 1727-0101 www.vancouverhome.com



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DOWNTOWN PIED-À-CIEL

The views shine at this high-flying condo

BY PHILLIPA RISPIN • PHOTOGRAPHY: ROGER BROOKS • STYLING: PATRICIA GRAY AND SEAN LEW

DESIGN

CAN A PIED-À-TERRE high above the city be called a pied-à-ciel? This condo apartment downtown is the second home for a couple who live mainly outside Vancouver. It's on the 37th storey and offers 180-degree views of the city—heavenly, but a challenge for interior designer Patricia Gray, who had to showcase the views while providing a quietly luxurious aerie for her clients.

“When we first viewed this condo it was a classic bachelor pad—black leather sofa pit and a huge TV blocking the view,” says Gray, president of Patricia Gray Inc. “It didn't have any character. What it did have was a spectacular 180-degree view of downtown Vancouver but no redeeming features when you looked back into the suite, in particular the entry foyer.”

Gray's brief from her clients was very simply stated: to provide a five-star hotel feeling to the 1,760-square-foot apartment. They wanted a place to sit in the entry, a Duxiana bed in the master bedroom, and office space with Aeron chairs; otherwise, Gray was pretty much free to do whatever was needed. ☞

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This mirror on the foyer wall farthest from the windows reflects the view for the benefit of anyone standing with his back to the main space.

Of course, that freedom was set in context. “I offer a complete design service for my clients, including full design-build project management, which includes everything that’s required to make a space personal for them,” Gray says. “I have an extensive interview process. By determining their lifestyle requirements at the onset, I develop a complete design concept for them. Before we start, they know exactly what their home is going to look



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like when it is finished. Everything is designed and priced, and the clients approve the concept and budget. We then proceed and hand over a completed home for them ready to move into.”

Gray and her assistant Sean Lew first set about “redeeming” the foyer. Providing a five-star ambience is not simply a question of populating a room with expensive furniture and accessories; it’s about creating an overall atmosphere of luxury. In this case, Gray paid

particular attention to surfaces for subtle effect. The foyer was given a walnut dropped ceiling around its perimeter, creating a recessed ceiling finished with silver leaf and LED cove lighting for a smooth, warm look. The grasscloth from Phillip Jeffries that covers the foyer walls offers an unobtrusively tactile surface. It has a subtle greige metallic finish that provides what Gray calls a “chameleon colour.” A settee, designed by Gray, in a medium-dark

taupe-grey velvet with a ruched back is both functional and a textural accent in the space. The existing chunky closet doors and the door to the master bedroom were replaced with frameless sandblasted glass doors in keeping with the subtle decor. ☞

(Opposite) The homeowners had fallen in love with Gray’s painting Reflections, now above the foyer’s settee, even before they made the decision to hire her.



With its two bedrooms (each with an ensuite bathroom), powder room, office, open living-dining space and alcove kitchen, the apartment met all the clients' needs, and there was no need for structural changes. "Our major challenge came in furnishing the suite and grounding the space while keeping the view as the main attraction," Gray says. "We used a large area rug to define the living room. In a place like this there are several focal points—the view, the big-screen

TV, conversations in the living and dining areas—and thus I placed two custom-designed chairs that swivel in the corner by the window."

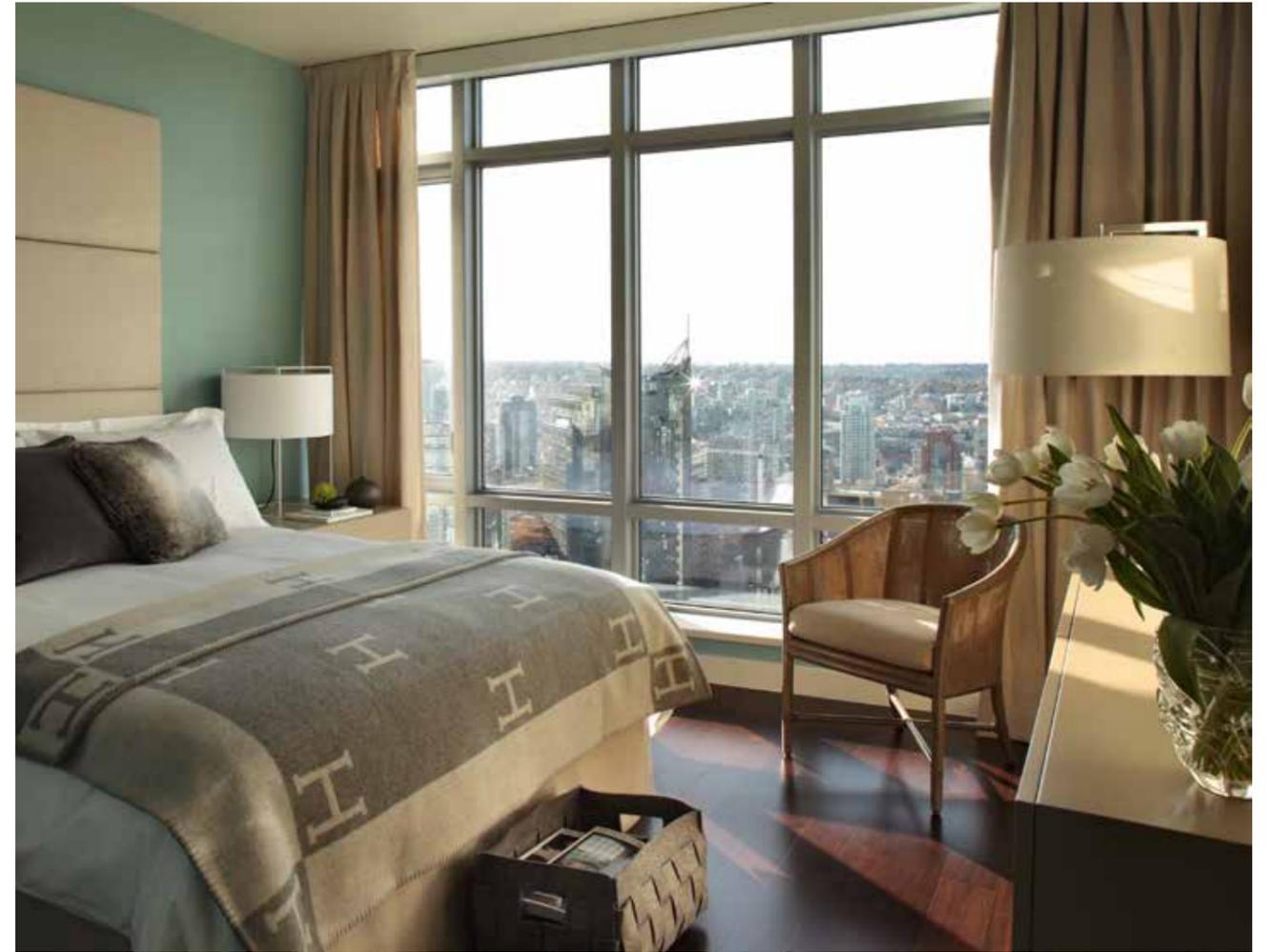
Even the chandelier over the dining table was designed with the views in mind. When it's not lit, its handmade Venetian crystal tiles hang unobtrusively from a base covered in the same leather that upholsters the dining chairs.

Muted neutral and earthy tones predominate throughout, contributing to the sense of quiet,

calm luxury. Many items in the apartment are custom-made to Gray's specifications: furniture, millwork, media centre, lighting and exterior furnishings. An accomplished artist, she also executed the artwork gracing several walls. 

The walnut paneling of the foyer's ceiling continues into the living room for continuity, expanding down a wall to form a cabinet for the television and other media paraphernalia.





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“What I do is unique and specific for each client,” says Gray. “I like to think of my design as couture.”

One element Gray did not design is the bear sculpture by artist Cathryn Jenkins on the substantial 200-square-foot balcony. “It’s a wonderful sculpture, and we wanted to set it on artificial turf to make the bear look as though it’s in its natural environment. We had to get the strata council to accept this. It took time, but we finally got it approved.”

The strata council might have been careful and cautious, but the clients gave Gray their full trust—to great success.

“They are wonderful people and pretty much let us have free rein in all the design decisions and choosing all art pieces,” Gray says. “They were on vacation when we finished the installation. We had everything ready for them on their return, complete with flowers everywhere and the kitchen stocked, beds made,

artwork hung, etcetera. They walked into their new home and phoned us, completely ecstatic.”

And the clients weren’t the only ones to be impressed: This project won first place in the Residential Design category at the Northwest Design Awards 2014. ▶

(Opposite) Gray’s painting Autumn’s Glow, in the master bedroom, injects a strong dose of colour into the otherwise neutral decor.

