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Industrial Chic

Soothing neutrals and abundant textures soften the edges of a loft-style townhouse in downtown Chicago

It's every homeowner's dream: to create a place in which each room is inviting and artfully arranged. When the husband and wife owners sought a counterpoint to their suburban residence, they found a four-story townhouse in downtown Chicago with full-on river views that seemed the ideal home for achieving their goals. But their vision for how they wanted to live there proved more difficult to realize than expected.

"We'd found a home that we loved and renovated it in the industrial loft style that we loved, but when we began to furnish it something didn't feel right," the husband recalls. "The dots were not connecting."

Enter interior designer Michael Del Piero, whose work was recommended to the couple for her distinctive style that melds strong shapes, salvaged surfaces, and elegant details, evident both in the homes of her clients as well as in her Chicago shop, Michael Del Piero Good Design. In short, hers was an aesthetic that seemed ideally suited to this particular space that had been designed by project architect Michael Abraham and an earlier interior designer, Megan Arity.

"The house had wonderful surfaces throughout,

like wide-plank distressed French oak floors, reclaimed barn-wood cabinets, marble-slab countertops, and smooth white walls," says Del Piero. "We just needed to find a way to tie everything together."

In discussing the direction of the project with the owners, Del Piero was given a clear sense of what they had in mind. "It was important to the couple that the interiors be sophisticated and highly personal but also that they be comfortable," she says. "It had to be a place where their kids, friends, and pets would all feel at ease."

To begin, Del Piero chose an overarching neutral palette that allowed each individual element in the house to work as a cohesive whole. Onto that backdrop she layered even more textures — wonderfully tactile fabrics, time-worn collections, and accessories crafted of wood, metal, leather,

Left: The centerpiece of the living room of a new Chicago townhouse is a collection of antique Chinese stone mortars. Their subtle color variations are reflected in the trio of pillows that top the custom sofa and in the de Le Cuona linen that covers it.

INTERIOR DESIGN BY MICHAEL DEL PIERO
ARCHITECTURE BY MICHAEL ABRAHAM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JANET MESIC-MACKIE
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Positioned within the sitting area are three armchairs from (left to right) Gregorius Pineo, with Mark Alexander fabric; another custom slipcovered in Donghia fabric; and Dennis & Leen, covered with Edelman suede. The custom yellow-pine table with black-lacquer finish is designed by Michael Del Piero and built by Tim Thompson Designs.

and glass. “When using neutrals, my philosophy is the more texture the better,” Del Piero explains. “There’s no limit to the number of textures that can be mixed together, something that cannot be said of patterns.”

Structurally, Del Piero found no need for modifications, with the exception of the living room where soaring fifteen-foot ceilings had created large empty spaces on either side of the fireplace. To add visual interest, she designed floor-to-ceiling shelves and called upon Tim Thompson, the builder who oversaw the home’s renovation, to install them. Once in place, a new question presented itself: What should be displayed on the shelves? After initially considering a collection of Han pottery — smooth, curvaceous vessels in a pleasing array of taupe and gray—the owners stumbled upon a group of antique Chinese stone mortars in The Golden Triangle, a Chicago shop brimming with Asian antiques and artifacts. “The rough surfaces of the mortars worked even better in the space,” she says. It took several buying trips to China to gather the nearly two hundred and fifty examples that now fill the shelves. Today the arrangement is one of the centerpieces of the home.

When selecting the furniture and accessories that would populate each room, Del Piero chose items that spanned the globe — and the centuries. In the foyer, a thoughtful vignette reflected in a towering custom mirror incorporates a stone altar from China, a wooden bust from Argentina, and a stack of eighteenth-century vellum volumes. Into the mix, Del Piero positioned a glass-and-wire creation by contemporary Chicago artist Lucy Slivinski. “An entryway should immediately tell guests what they’re about to see,” Del Piero states. That is certainly the case here.

The designer’s thoughtful curation can be found

in all corners of the house, from the liveliest gathering spots to cozy nooks that inspire quiet tête-à-têtes. To transform a sunny alcove off the living room into a sitting area, Del Piero sketched out a low custom table, slightly higher than a coffee table to easily accommodate a game or a bite to eat. Tim Thompson crafted the table from yellow pine with a black lacquer finish. Around the table, a trio of armchairs, each with a distinctly different silhouette, was positioned. “It took several variations to find just the right combination,” says Del Piero. “Using three of the same chair would have felt more like a showroom than a house.”

Throughout the design process, the couple was not merely bystanders; they were interested and involved from start to finish. The placement of the living room’s stone mortars was their own doing, and when Del Piero was searching for sculptural elements to enliven a wall in the master bedroom, it was the husband who came up with the idea for mounting a collection of old camera lenses. “I had been thinking perhaps antique candy molds, but when I saw the amazing variation of metallics on the lenses — silver, gold, pewter — I knew it would look beautiful,” Del Piero says.

Thinking back to those days when the vision of their dream home simply wasn’t clicking, the couples’ townhouse now exceeds their expectations. The husband elaborates, “We feel happy every time we walk in.”

Right: An artful mix of shapes, textures, and materials greets guests in the foyer, including a twentieth-century Chinese limestone altar, hand-carved wooden bust from Argentina, and a salvaged metal and crystal-wrapped vase by Chicago artist Lucy Slivinski.









A painting by the Zhou Brothers sets the mood in the dining room, where platinum-trimmed Casamidy wing chairs covered in a flax-wool from Hodsoll McKenzie surround a wenge-wood table from Piet Boon. Walls use Farrow & Ball's Skimming Stone.



A quirky collection of vintage camera lenses embedded in the drywall enliven a master bedroom wall. Reflecting the home's mix, an antique Chinese elmwood chair is paired with an acrylic and leather desk from Dessin Fournir. Side table is from Holly Hunt. Walls use Farrow & Ball's Elephant's Breath. The coverlet fabric is Kravet.





Although not part of Michael Del Piero's design scheme, the master bath's Ann Sacks wall tiles and Wisconsin limestone underfoot reflect a similar mix of texture and color found elsewhere in the home. A rain head from Grohe complements polished nickel fixtures from Kohler.

*“If too many elements in a room match, the result
feels more like a showroom than a home.”*

— Michael Del Piero