

Advertisement

washingtonpost.com > Home & Garden > Furnishings/Design

- Print This Article
- E-Mail This Article
- Subscribe to The Post

MOST VIEWED ARTICLES
Home, Garden On the Site
Updated 7:15 p.m. ET

- Hints From Heloise
- CLICK HERE
- Hints From Heloise
- Resolve to Be a Better-Informed Renter in the New Year
- Hints From Heloise

RSS NEWS FEEDS

- XML Top News
- XML Furnishings/Design

What is RSS? | All RSS Feeds

Advertisement



Doing More With Less

Sometimes, Taking Away Doors, Molding, Railings, Cupboards and Vents Leaves More Room for Style

By Patricia Dane Rogers
Washington Post Staff Writer
Thursday, February 21, 2002; Page H01

For many homeowners, renovation is a matter of addition: more bookcases, more built-ins, new crown molding, sometimes new rooms.

Andreas Charalambous, a modernist Washington architect and artist, believes instead in the power of subtraction: He takes away more than he puts in.

About three years ago, Charalambous bought a duplex apartment at Beekman Place, one of 216 units built on the site of the long-demolished 19th-century mansion known as Henderson Castle on 16th Street NW, across from Meridian Hill Park. The day he closed, he began subtracting things.

Andreas Charalambous's old living room had an unsightly vent and unwanted moldings. (Andreas Charalambous)

"The interiors were very dated -- very '70s" he said. "The minute I walked in, I knew there were things that needed to go. No matter how nice they were to some people, I couldn't live with them."

Join the Discussion

- Message Boards: Talk to other washingtonpost.com readers about decorating tips and tricks.

Free E-mail Newsletters

- Home & Shopping

See a Sample | Sign Up Now

Out came walls, parquet flooring and a hodgepodge of light fixtures and ceiling fans. Wrought-iron banisters and paneled doors were carted away. Cabinets were ripped out of kitchen and bath, along with the living room's fireplace mantel. Chair rails and crown molding were stripped away, leaving walls as bare as a blank canvas. Unsightly vents, which could not be eliminated, were moved to less visible positions.

"I told the contractor to get rid of pretty much everything," said Charalambous.

When it came time to start putting things back, materials, colors and architectural details were kept simple and to the point. "This project," he said, "is all about the minimal amount of elements you need to have a

clean-lined house."

Instead of the three kinds of flooring he found in the two-level apartment -- parquet, tile and linoleum -- he used one light

Advertisement



FEATURED ADVERTISER LINKS

- Super Bowl Tickets, Maryland Terps Tickets
- Vioxx, Personal Injury Lawyers: get help now
- Drink Less Water
- Learn 5 "Secret" Vanguard funds to buy-FREE!
- Re-Grow your own hair. FREE Hair Transplant.
- \$160,000 Mortgage for Under \$735/Month!
- Get up to \$200 from Citibank - Get details
- 30 COMMISSION-FREE trades. Now at Ameritrade.

hardwood throughout. He turned a step-down back patio into a deck on the same level as the living room floor and stained it the same color to make them seem one of a piece.



The '70s kitchen before renovation. (Andreas Charalambous)

Burnished concrete is used for countertops in kitchen and baths; the same flush door style and the same cabinet hardware appear repeatedly; light fixtures in every room -- an inconspicuous German track system featuring slender aluminum wands that cantilever from the walls -- form a chorus line of arcs ending in tiny halogen bulbs. An ebonized finish unites all wood furnishings, right down to the picture frames. Every wall is painted one of two shades of the same cream color.

Repeating the same colors, materials and finishes establishes a sense of cohesion, says Charalambous. It also saves time. "It's more efficient to go one place for all your concrete countertops than to one for tile, one for marble and one for granite."



The renovated kitchen, with wall cabinets removed to make room for art and gallery lighting, and appliances relocated on the opposite wall. (Geoffrey Hodgdon)

The architect's goal was to spin out the illusion of as much space as possible in 1,250 square feet divided between two floors. He wanted a tranquil place to live, to paint and to show his artwork -- an interim gallery between exhibitions.

Charalambous, the principal of Forma Design on U Street NW, has spent most of his 18-year career in Washington. Born in London and raised in Cyprus, he trained as a painter before enrolling in Cornell University's architecture program.

He launched Forma in 1994 with Cornell classmate Ernesto Santalla, who now heads a firm of his own. Before that, Charalambous had worked with major firms here and abroad -- HOK, Architectural Services, Studios and Ellerbe Becket -- on large commercial buildings, residential towers and individual houses. All modern.

In addition to architecture, his firm offers interior, product and graphic design services. Charalambous deployed all these disciplines at Beekman Place, where he edited and reorganized the space, designed most of the furnishings and produced all the art -- large abstract color-field paintings as well as black-and-white photographs of antiquities.

Even before the recent renovations, the Beekman Place apartment had a lot going for it, including an in-town location, off-street parking and a view of the Washington Monument from the master bedroom. The entry level includes a foyer, two bedrooms and two baths. A lower level contains the living room, patio and an eat-in kitchen. Charalambous, who had been living in a studio apartment overflowing with canvases, was moving into double the space, but it was anything but the streamlined setting he'd imagined.

The whole place felt crowded and chopped up. His first impression of the tiny foyer: beat-up parquet, an abundance of vinyl grass cloth wallpaper and a head-on view of a staircase as dark and narrow as a tunnel. "The wall between the stairs and the master bedroom split the space in two," he said. Worse were the doors: Four of them opened into the entryway. The lower level was equally busy with yet more doors, parquet plus grass cloth, chair rails and a looming, off-center vent that dominated a living

room wall.

He started by uncluttering the upstairs layout, removing doors wherever he could and opening doorways and hallways up to the ceiling. A wall between the master bedroom and the staircase was eliminated entirely.

Where necessary for bedrooms and bathrooms, Charalambous used frameless, floor-to-ceiling doors with minimalist nickel pulls in lieu of traditional knobs, which protrude. When closed, the sleek new doors, including the one to the master bedroom, lie flush -- an arrangement so seamless they read as continuous wall.

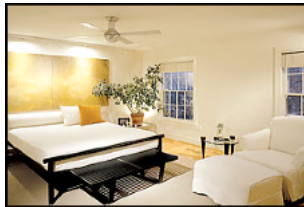


The old master bedroom had dated fixtures and shuttered windows. (Andreas Charalambous)

"I don't like things that pop out at you, and I like straight lines," he said. "I'm not into curves and busy detailing."

In the tiny bathrooms, floor-to-ceiling mirrors maximize space. The pale wood flooring flows uninterrupted from room to

room. Paintings and light fixtures (Buschfeld Monopoints from Illuminations downtown) march around the rooms, beginning in the foyer, traveling down to the living room wall and into the kitchen, where upper cabinets were sacrificed for the march of art. On the wall opposite the paintings, appliances are grouped in niches to be less conspicuous. By reducing the kitchen to the size of a galley, he gained two walk-in closets -- one for the laundry, the other for his canvases. "I wanted the kitchen to feel like an extension of the living room," says Charalambous, who also says he doesn't cook much.



With new light wood flooring, a modern fan and no shutters, the room adopts the sleek feeling of the rest of the house. (Geoffrey Hodgdon)

He paints at home, though, in concentrated bursts, using the guest room or the patio -- draped first in large dropcloths, of course -- as his studio. From the patio he can look into the living room and see himself and his work reflected in the oversize mirror he propped against the living room wall. The mirror

also hides a vent he lowered.

Minimal furnishings throughout contribute to the sense of flow: A square-within-a-square design is repeated on the coffee table, the dining table and the soft Tibetan living room rug. Diaphanous curtains hang from a stainless steel rod. Made of a Donghia silk backed with metal fibers, the curtains let in light but not UV rays -- damaging to paintings. Unifying the space upstairs and down are pale colors so subtly sponged that you barely notice them. Art delivers all the color.

(Charalambous sells his furniture designs through his Web site, www.formaonline.com, his rugs through Classic Floor Designs Inc. and paintings through the Ralls Collection, both in the District.)

The overall impression is of carefully calibrated order. There's not a scrap of paper out of place. In fact, there is not a scrap of paper: When Charalambous is home, he works on a laptop; he gets his printouts at the office. "I don't like clutter," he says. "I feel more relaxed when I don't have too many things to distract me."

© 2002 The Washington Post Company

Advertisement



FREE* Dinner at Olive Garden®!
[Click here to Claim!](#)

*details © 2004 YourGiftCards.com

SEARCH: News Web by   [Top 20 E-mailed Articles](#)

© Copyright 1996-2005 The Washington Post Company | [User Agreement and Privacy Policy](#) | [Rights and Permissions](#) | [Home](#)

washingtonpost.com: [Contact Us](#) | [About Us](#) | [Work at washingtonpost.com](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Media Center](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Archives](#)
[E-mail Newsletters](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [Wireless Access](#) | [Our headlines on your site](#) | [Make Us Your Homepage](#) | [mywashingtonpost.com](#)
The Washington Post: [Subscribe](#) | [Subscriber Services](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Electronic Edition](#) | [Online Photo Store](#)
The Washington Post Company: [Information](#) | [Other Post Co. Websites](#)