

# JOIE *de* VIVRE

Elegant lines and a casual flow create a Parisian-inspired entertaining haven for empty nesters in Chicago.

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Interior Design: James Dolenc and Tom Riker, James Thomas  
Home Builder: Bill Wangler, Wangler and Company, Inc.

**I**n the design world, there's nothing better than a repeat client," designer James Dolenc muses. "That innate trust is built in, and it opens the door for real exploration, where you can push the envelope a little bit more." In the case of a condominium overlooking Lake Michigan for longtime clients Suzanne Muchin and David Brown—for whom Dolenc and design partner Tom Riker have completed seven other projects—that exploration included what Dolenc calls a "total 180," from traditional to contemporary. Despite the excitement and challenge of a whole new vibe for this home, their approach remained the same: "No matter the size or scope," he says, "we always start with a strong concept."

That concept was informed by the couple's love of hosting friends and family, as well as their desire for this condo to reflect how they currently live. With five grown children and two grandchildren—all of whom have spent years in environments created by Dolenc and Riker—the owners were happy for their roles as consummate hosts to now lead the design. As such, the kitchen, dining room and living room have emerged as a trifecta of entertaining destinations, supplemented by David's office, which easily converts to adjunct space for cocktails and dining. After more than 20 years in their previous residence, Suzanne notes, "We were ready for another way of living."

First on the docket, Dolenc explains, was the consideration of spatial movement. At just over a decade old, the Lucien Lagrange–designed building offered many opportunities for innovative solutions to issues caused by its unusual layout. Working with general contractor Bill Wangler, the designers approached the interiors as a living, breathing organism. "The vestibule is like an architectural compass; the rotunda orients and unites the surrounding spaces with a sense of effortless flow," he observes. To calm the oval space, the designer commissioned artist Danya Elbaridi to create a hand-painted wall mural of the Old City of Jerusalem. "It's a

point of reflection," says Dolenc, who curated a serene palette of cream and white for the foyer, punctuated by Gustavian-blue chairs with gilded accents. This tranquil moment offers a soothing pause before gracefully leading visitors into the grandeur of the living room beyond. "The entire space opens up to a massive panorama of the lake, Navy Pier, and a gorgeous view over Lincoln Park and the city," Suzanne adds.

Guiding the design aesthetic was the idea of a chic Paris pied-à-terre. The team, which included project lead Emily Gerow and project designer Tyson Lamm, introduced contemporary furnishings whose silhouettes pay homage to influences ranging from Art Deco to 19<sup>th</sup>-century European to midcentury modern, blended in a way that gives each room a sense of elegance. Naturally, some moments demanded customization. In the living room, shaped like a generous slice of pie and dominated by a curving wall of windows, a sofa was designed to "mirror the gentle arc of the building's façade," Dolenc describes. "This piece not only serves as a striking anchor for the room but also enhances its flow and balance, creating a perfect harmony between architecture and design."

This unity is also apparent in the kitchen, whose renewal was completed in partnership with designer Ann Stockard of O'Brien Harris. "The team wanted the space to look light and airy, so they opted for open shelving with Parisian detailing," Stockard says. As a natural extension of the living room, the kitchen more closely resembles a romantic restaurant in the 6<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris. One subtle but powerful design choice drives it all: a pair of antiqued-brass lamps with pink linen shades, hardwired into the marble island. "The lamps add personality," Dolenc notes. "Where one might be tempted to add pendants or a chandelier, they provide human scale."

Throughout the residence, a balance of restraint and flair elevates the design and purely reflects the clients' joyful spirit. "The key was to not encumber spaces with ornate detailing," Dolenc says. "It's the opposite of overwrought. It's simple and clean." And, he adds, "It's all about them." ■

The vestibule, with a hand-painted mural of the Old City of Jerusalem by Studio Lunarix, leads to the foyer. There, a pair of Niemann Weeks armchairs flank a credenza by Olivya Stone. The lamps are Visual Comfort & Co., and the mirror is by RT Facts.

**Previous page:** Accommodating gatherings both large and small, the living room's curved sofa, crafted by Barron Custom Furniture, plays nicely with the Holly Hunt coffee table. Lighting includes an Arteriors floor lamp as well as a table lamp and ceiling fixture by Visual Comfort & Co.





An Abelardo Morell photograph anchors the dining room, which contains a hidden bar sheathed in antique mirror and walnut. Venetian plaster walls backdrop a Fisher Weisman chandelier and an Old Biscayne Designs table surrounded by A. Rudin chairs.



Open brass-and-glass shelves from Urban Archaeology, a custom stainless-steel-and-brass hood above the Wolf range, and Calacatta Viola marble countertops from Calia Stone Boutique introduce Parisian style in the kitchen. The lamps are by Charles Edwards.



Enveloping the primary bedroom is a soft blush wallcovering by Phillip Jeffries. A chandelier from Visual Comfort & Co. rises above the room, which features Coraggio drapery fabric, a custom bed and settee, both fabricated by Eurocraft, Inc., and Matouk linens.

**Opposite:** The powder room is enlivened by a Timorous Beasties wallpaper. New Ravenna floor tiles from The Fine Line run beneath a floating vanity adorned with Waterworks fixtures. A sconce from The Urban Electric Co. rests against the custom mirror from Karesh Glass, LLC.





On the terrace, a klismos-style dining table and chairs by RH complement the neoclassical lines of the contemporary building's exterior. Beyond, a more casual seating area consists of a Brown Jordan chair and Bernhardt side table.