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A wide-angle photograph of a modern penthouse terrace at dusk. The terrace features a long, white, rectangular table with a matching bench, set with a white ceramic vase and a small tray. To the right, a large, multi-armed cactus sits in a planter. The floor is made of large, dark grey tiles. In the background, a city skyline is visible under a twilight sky, with a prominent skyscraper on the left. A large tree is planted in the center of the terrace. The terrace is enclosed by a glass railing, and a large glass door on the left leads into the interior of the penthouse.

MODERN VIEWS

CLEAN LINES AND CONTEMPORARY FURNISHINGS ALLOW A SUN-DRENCHED PENTHOUSE TO FOCUS ON ITS PANORAMIC CITY VISTAS.

WRITTEN BY TATE GUNNERSON / PHOTOGRAPHY BY BILL TIMMERMAN

We wanted to create a serene sanctuary within the city," explains architectural designer Sarah Swartz Wessel of the Phoenix penthouse apartment that she and her husband, architectural designer and general contractor Ethan Wessel, redesigned for their clients, Mike Sparaco and Darin Osborne. The duo had earned the couple's trust by also devising their previous single-family home in nearby Paradise Valley. "We love the turnkey process from design to build," Mike says, "and we're drawn to the clean lines and the quality of their work."

Built atop a commercial building in Midtown during its conversion to residential, the unit, though brand-new, had an indeterminate character that begged to be streamlined. Ductwork and steel beams covered with fireproof spray had been left exposed in some areas and hidden behind drywall in others, and for such a large space, the layout felt choppy and enclosed. For the owners, who frequently host large soirees for friends and nonprofit organizations, entertaining is a top priority, so they asked the design team to create a more open and efficient layout. "We wanted to correct some of the interior flow issues," Darin says. "It was very door-intensive and we like more connected spaces."

To produce the sense of openness that their clients envisioned, the Wessels concentrated on refining the interior finishes, eliminating walls and minimizing visual clutter. They crafted a large piece of lacquered casework along the wall of windows, for example, to conceal the home's mechanicals, roll shades and extraneous wiring.

Removing a spare bedroom created the kind of open layout that the owners envisioned for their collection of artwork and classic furnishings, which include the living room's modern sofa from Hold It Contemporary Home in San Diego—dressed in Maxwell's Quiet Chinchilla—and a custom acacia-wood-and-acrylic cocktail table from Levi Christiansen. The hand-woven Surya rug is from Copenhagen Imports.



"We worked really hard to minimize detail and keep things simple, clean and aligned," Ethan Wessel explains. "When we do work like this in the city, we like to think of it as one giant piece of casework—a jewel box within the building. It's kind of like living in a big, beautiful cabinet."

Even the doors have been designed to be as unobtrusive as possible with simple pivot hinges and no doorjambs across the top. When opened, the nesting entry door to the master bedroom becomes flush with the adjacent wall. "It's kind of like a moving wall," Sarah Swartz Wessel says. "When closed, it disappears and looks like a panel." The oak doorframes match the unit's 8-inch-wide white-oak flooring, which the Wessels chose for its clean look, as well as its lightness. "We're purists and like a look that is modern yet natural and timeless," Sarah Swartz Wessel explains.

Removing walls was also a key element in creating a sense of openness on the first floor, where the designers eliminated a third bedroom that was adjacent to the kitchen and living room. "No matter how big or small the kitchen is, everybody just always seems to end up there," Darin explains. "So we wanted to make it the star." Aware that the home would be the venue for many social gatherings, the Wessels created a continuous kitchen and bar area using a mix of aluminum and laminate cabinetry from Bulthaup. "We wrapped the cabinetry in an L-shape from the kitchen to the bar," Sarah Swartz Wessel says. As it happens, Mike and Darin remodeled their second home in San Diego at the same time and selected Bulthaup cabinetry for that house, as well. "Regardless of what state we're in it still feels like home, because each space is very similar," Mike notes.

On the upper level, a wall to the office was also eliminated to create a sort of mezzanine overlooking the living areas and to open the view to both the south- and west-facing windows. A new glass railing allows natural daylight to flow into the space unobstructed. "The office is now light-filled from two directions," Sarah Swartz Wessel says. To bring natural daylight into the interior spaces, several walls, such as between the master bedroom and bath, and the master closet and mezzanine, were replaced



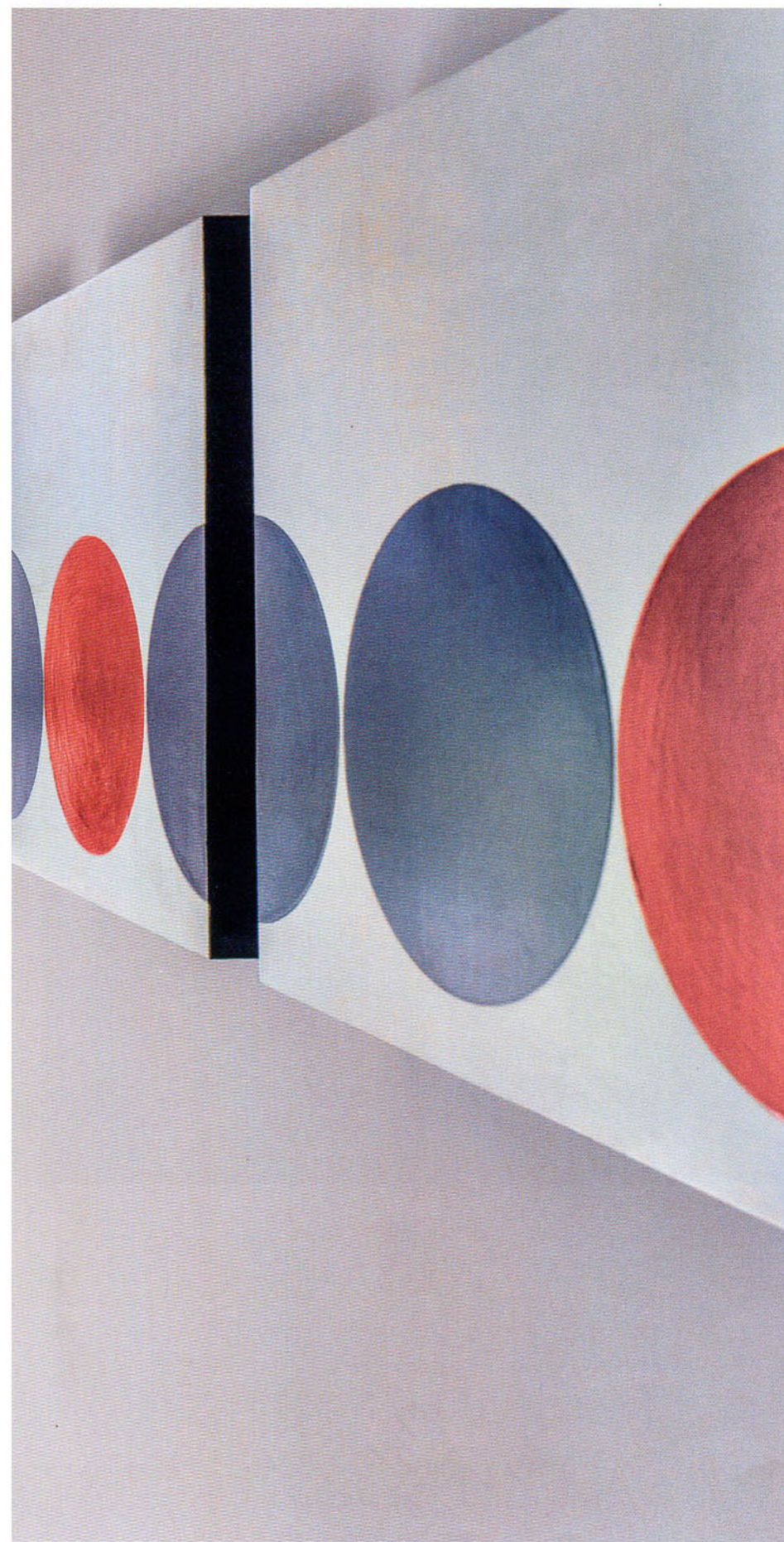
Above: The kitchen features a full-surface induction cooktop and other Gaggenau appliances from Bulthaup Scottsdale. Premiere Wood Floors installed the oiled European white-oak flooring by DuChateau Floors; the painting under the stairs is by Matt Priebe from Art One Gallery.

Right: A set of modern stainless-steel LEM piston stools—designed by Shin and Tomoko Azumi—from Design Within Reach reside in a bar area adjacent to the open kitchen. The custom cabinetry and white glass-paneled backsplash are both from Bulthaup Scottsdale.



A custom oiled-white-oak table by Bulthaup Scottsdale extends the kitchen island and provides a distinct dining area. Custom millwork by Tennen Construction that runs along the expansive Fleetwood windows conceals mechanicals in a clean-lined way.





Another work by Priebe, to the left, joins a triptych by Anthony Zeh to transform the first-floor hallway into a gallery-like space; the wood-glass-and-welded-steel stairway looks like a piece of sculpture all its own.

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To bring the outside in, the owners created *Central Phoenix in White*, a textured wall vinyl by Photo Tex, purchased through AlphaGraphics, that features photographer Kevin Sarault's image of the Phoenix skyline. The Chelsea platform bed by Modloft is clad in gray leather.



Glass railings from Mirror Works allow natural daylight to filter into the catwalk-style hallway overlooking the main living areas. Alan Bur Johnson's *Murmuration* 19:29:39, 2012, from Lisa Sette Gallery, is displayed along the stairway wall, while *Angels Among Us*, hand-painted acrylic on layered acrylic panels, by Phoenix artist Rocco Menaguale, takes center stage upstairs.



with translucent glass. "The master bathroom and closet are now filled with light, and that made a huge difference in how the unit feels," Sarah Swartz Wessel says. "It's a total sanctuary and just exudes such a happy feeling."

Although the Phoenix and San Diego homes both possess a modernist aesthetic, only the penthouse unit offers a 1,500-square-foot rectilinear balcony with spectacular skyline views. And though there were originally only two sets of telescoping patio doors, the Wessels successfully lobbied the homeowners association for permission to add a third set. "The new doors give us better access to the patio from three key points, which helps with both airflow and for entertaining purposes," Mike explains. To help filter out the strong southwestern sunlight, landscape architect Chad Robert

brought in Mexican bird of paradise trees and designed built-in lighting and custom fiberglass planters, which include a table ledge for cocktails. "It's fun for me to create and do new things that have never been done before," says Robert, who also stained the existing floating concrete pavers that conceal drainage and irrigation in three different colors and created a grid-like pattern for interest.

Both the spacious outdoor area and the more open interior have been a hit with Mike and Darin, who recently hosted between 85 and 100 neighbors for an evening gathering set up by the building's social committee. "The weather was perfect, so people were moving between the inside and out," Darin says. "The flow functioned exactly as we had envisioned." ■

The designers opened a wall to create a more open second-floor office, which is furnished with a Quovis table by Giulio Lazzotti and Hudson task chairs in brushed aluminum by Philippe Starck for Emeco, all from Design Within Reach; the Francesca sectional, covered in tufted white leather, is from Copenhagen Imports.