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ACQUIRED TASTE

Interior designer Carola Pimentel mixes a client's treasured furnishings with fresh choices to create an understated penthouse on Belle Isle.

Text John O'Connor **Photos** Mark Roskams

WHILE IT MAY BE MORE FUN for a designer to be given carte blanche with a client's blessing to create whatever he or she wants, there are jobs that offer a little more challenge – and a little more reward.

When Assure, Inc. Interiors' Carola Pimentel took on a 4,700-square-foot duplex redesign, she was given one of the latter opportunities. The owner of the apartment came with a trousseau of sorts, an assemblage of vintage furniture, rugs and art he was not about to part with just to please a designer. So, Pimentel reworked the space top to bottom, literally, pairing classic modern pieces with the client's own collections. The end result is, in a word, real. We recently spoke to the designer about this overhaul.

HOME MIAMI: What was your client after here?

CAROLA PIMENTEL: The client, Richard Fuller, is a single gentleman from New York. He came to Miami and just wanted to simplify his life after living in a single-family home. The apartment was a large space, and I proposed flipping it from the way it was originally laid out. I wanted to get as much open space as possible.

I moved the primary living spaces, including the kitchen, dining room, living room and master bedroom downstairs. I wanted them all on one floor. The upstairs acquired an office, TV room and guest rooms. It was the other way around when he purchased it.

HOME: So besides the flip, you said it was too divided?

PIMENTEL: Yes, well, the great thing about this project was the space planning. I took the floor plan, reworked it and made a presentation to him. He loved it. Now that it is done, the minute you walk in, the spaces read as wide open. I want to bring the outside inside, especially here in South Florida. Removing extra walls and divisions is one way to do that.

HOME: Did the client give you indications of what he wanted?

PIMENTEL: Not really. Before I began the space planning we

Owner Richard Fuller's antique Oriental rug acts as a grounding device for several diverse pieces including Passmore armchairs in blue leather designed by Gordon Guillaumier for Minotti and Chinese petrified wood tables by Jalan Jalan. Art on the wall is a relief panel salvaged from the exterior of the Barbizon Hotel in New York.

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By mixing vintage pieces with contemporary, Carola Pimentel composed crisp spaces with character.

A custom upholstered bed is flanked by mirrored bedside tables from Jalan Jalan. Custom bed linens made by Threadcount in Miami Beach. Lamps by Jonathan Adler carry over the mid-century feel of the client's vintage slipper chair. The framed photo series titled *Ribbon Trip* is by J. Barron.

went to his existing home and did an inventory of what he wanted to keep. I asked him what his typical day was like. When you wake up, how do you start your day? Do you shower first? Do you have your coffee here, or are you more likely to have it over here? Then we planned around how the client actually lives. Richard was very open to my ideas as a professional. He travels a lot and he loves to pick up ideas here and there. And I tried to incorporate them when appropriate. Overall he was very open to our suggestions.

HOME: The apartment is soft, subtle ... yet very much its own. There is a great mix of old and new.

PIMENTEL: It's true. Look at the living room. The antique Oriental rug is one of his pieces. The style I use is modern, but I try to marry everything together. We mixed the vintage pieces with things like the Minotti chairs in navy blue leather. The sofa is also from Minotti. Then we added Chinese petrified wood stands from Jalan Jalan in the Design District. Some of the other pieces are from Ralph Lauren.

HOME: What about the master bedroom?

PIMENTEL: Bedrooms are my favorite. I love upholstered headboards, especially if the bedrooms are smaller. I created a shallow book unit for what would have been an empty wall. Then I created a place within that unit for a flat-screen TV on a pivot that could be pulled out at an angle and stored flat.

HOME: Tell us about the stairs. Are they original to the space?

PIMENTEL: No, I designed a new staircase comprised of a series of glass treads along a stainless steel spine. I wanted to create a stair that floated. It was difficult to design. I worked with Alvaro Naranjo, my project architect, to get it built.

HOME: Why are stairs like this not done more often?

PIMENTEL: There are stringent building codes you have to follow. They are not easy for many architects to figure out. The space cannot be more than four inches in

LEFT: The master bath and dressing room are opened up to the shower and bath beyond. Undermount sinks are topped by Sedona marble from Stone Source, New York. **RIGHT:** The designer and architect collaborated to create this stainless steel and tempered glass staircase. The stainless rail is echoed by a matching incised support on the veneered walls.

between steps. The glass is layered very thick. It was my idea, but Alvaro made it work. It was a great collaboration.

HOME: What is the most successful part for you from the standpoint of interior designer?

PIMENTEL: The master bath. In that room, instead of a typical enclosed bath, you walk into a very open space. I gave the client wall closets and then mirrored them. We designed an extremely long vanity, topped in polished marble. Then, instead of a solid wall, I created two slivers of mirror that are placed on sections of wall above each sink. There are openings in between looking into the shower, whirlpool and on to the outside. That bath appears so spacious at about 15 feet by 15 feet. I think in terms of space planning and use of materials, that room is fabulous. H