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Architect Ed Eubanks and interior designer Stacy Graubart turn an empty box into a home filled with details and antiques.

By Eliot Nusbaum Photography by Fran Brennan

THERE'S JUST NO NICE WAY TO DESCRIBE IT. "It was an empty box, raw space," says architect Ed Eubanks of the Houston condominium he had been asked to design. "When I say it was empty, I mean there was nothing but exterior walls—totally sterile."

But where others saw a featureless void (the apartment went unsold for six years), Eubanks and interior designer Stacy Graubart saw a great home for Graubart's mother, Jane Lewis, and her collection of antiques. It helped that this was the 20th apartment the architect had been called upon to design in the Huntington, a 34-story ➤



Furnishings for Jane Lewis's 16th-floor condo were chosen to warm the interiors without competing with sweeping views of Houston's skyline.

Inset: A pair of midcentury African chairs are the unofficial greeters in the foyer. Between them is a 17th-century Flemish mirror.

high-rise adjacent to Houston's exclusive River Oaks neighborhood. But of course, each homeowner has his or her own dreams.

"This was going to be my first home after the death of my husband, and I was really looking for a beautiful place," Jane says. A simple ambition, but therein lies the story.

"My mother has some very strong pieces, and we wanted the apartment to provide a background for them," says Graubart, who worked as a movie-set designer before becoming an interior designer. Jane had amassed a collection of antiques from her travels all over the world. Graubart added to the mix with additional antiques from shops in London, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York, plus what she describes as "a few oddments and funky found objects from junk stores and flea markets."

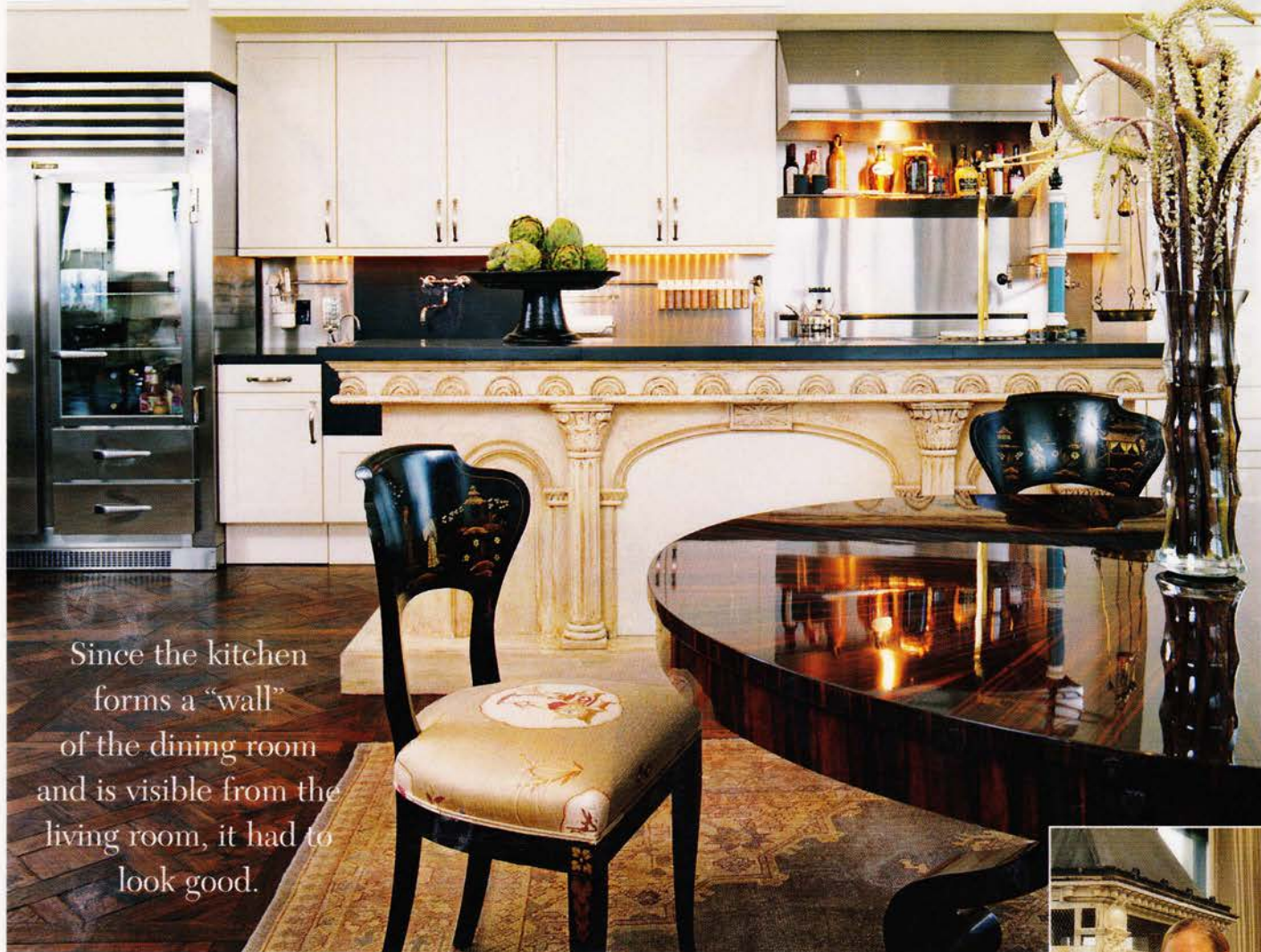
Eubanks, who shares Jane's love of fine, old things, envisioned an apartment with an old-world, prewar style, a place where he could incorporate interesting antique architectural elements and special paint finishes into his design.

In fact, it was Eubanks's love of antique architectural details that convinced Jane and her daughter that he was the right person for the job. "We walked into his office," Graubart recalls, "and there were finials everywhere and other random collections of architectural pieces. We had interviewed six other architects, but here was everything we liked, sitting around the office. I knew even before we met him that he was the right one." ➤



Above: The library is Graubart's favorite spot. "It's a great evening room," she says. The dramatic black walls pick up on strong black pieces in the rest of the home. To warm the room, there are walls of books, an antique Oriental rug, and a mix of French and English antiques. **Left:** The main sitting area, to the right of the fireplace, is furnished with a warm, inviting mix of periods—from the Biedermeier armchairs to the Lucite coffee table—and soft fabrics such as silk and velvet. The Oriental rug is a 19th-century Tabriz.





Graubart believes in using good cabinets and great hardware in the kitchen. She fashioned the island out of an old church altar that had been garishly painted and fitted with red lights. The sinks and countertops are honed slate.

Since the kitchen forms a “wall” of the dining room and is visible from the living room, it had to look good.

The mother-daughter duo’s taste for antiques mixed with the offbeat is obvious the moment you enter the 3,500-square-foot residence, which Eubanks laid out on the diagonal to the entry to break out of the condo’s boxy shape. In the foyer, an amusing pair of carved male and female African chairs—probably mid-20th-century—greet you. They bracket a 17th-century Flemish mirror that is “perhaps the best piece in the apartment,” says Graubart. Architectural details add even more presence, including a tray ceiling, extra-thick doorjambs, and 24-inch-square limestone tiles that define the foyer and run down the barrel-ceilinged back hall.

“An entryway says a lot about a house,” Graubart notes, “just like an invitation to a party says a lot about the party.” If that’s the case, Jane’s entryway says, “Don’t be surprised by what you see next.” Still, the old freezer door used as the apartment’s rear entrance and the gardening bench next to it in the back hallway are completely unexpected. This is the 16th floor, after all.

The foyer’s limestone flooring gives way to 36-inch-square parquetry tiles in the main living area. This large, open space encom-

passes the kitchen, dining area, several sitting areas, and a fireplace. Oh, and it also includes some spectacular views of the Houston skyline.

So, after being greeted by the African couple in the foyer, visitors are shown into the great room, with its fireplace and intimate seating area. And only after that does the apartment, and the remarkable view, unfold. Says Eubanks, “We were responding to the idea of having one big room where most of the living space was to be.” In fact, that one big room takes up nearly half of the condominium, which, for all its size, has, basically, just five rooms.

With the layout set, the challenge to Eubanks and Graubart became to make this essentially contemporary space comfortable for Jane. To that end, Eubanks softened the room with layered ➤



Jane Lewis, left, and her daughter, interior designer Stacy Graubart.



Left: Nineteenth-century Italian balustrades mark the start of the light-filled hallway that leads to the paneled master suite. The hallway also serves as a gallery and a cozy place to read.

Right: The barrel-ceilinged interior hallway off the foyer is lit by antique sconces. An antique freezer door and an old gardening bench, below, lend character to this visually important space. Jane, once an avid gardener, now grows orchids.



moldings, a detailed, old-world-style wood floor, and carved limestone for the fireplace. For her part, Graubart selected warm neutral colors for the walls and used lots of fabric—silk draperies, textured silk and velvet upholstery and pillows. Likewise, the woods are a warm mix—ranging from the golden fruitwoods of Jane's Swedish Biedermeier furniture to the deep mahogany of the floor.

"We wanted to maximize the expansive views since that is what Jane is paying for," Graubart explains. "Furniture is neutral in tone—or even invisible in the case of the acrylic coffee table. Because the view is so dominant, detail has been kept to a minimum so as not to detract."

The exact opposite is true of the study, which is off the living room area. It is a windowless room that has been painted a rich, glossy black. "We didn't want wood paneling, and I don't ever want to see another red library," notes Graubart. "The apartment has so many strong black pieces—the African chairs and other artifacts, the slate counter in the kitchen area, lamp shades, mirrors, the chinoiserie—that a black room plays off them nicely. It also contrasts dramatically with the cream-colored walls in the rest of the residence. It makes a great evening room." Warming up the study are walls of books, a cozy mishmash of antique furniture, a plush upholstered sofa, and a time-worn Oriental rug.

Perhaps the most surprising space in the apartment is a glass-walled hallway that leads from the great room to the master suite. In fact, Jane says this is her favorite space in the condo, high praise indeed for a passageway. But it is a hallway—albeit an extra-wide hallway—in proportion only. In addition to providing a breath-taking view, the hall serves as a gallery for art and artifacts, provides additional bookshelves, and makes a quiet spot to read.

"Ordinarily, this would be an interior hall," Eubanks explains, "but we like the surprise of having a large hall leading to the master bedroom, so we were generous with it and made it beautiful."

This was accomplished by shifting from the fine parquet flooring of the great room to wide mahogany planks, by using thick door-jambs, and by edging a portion of the walls with old Italian balustrades. "The advantage of working with an architect from the beginning," says Graubart, "is that we were able to dream up a space like this and build it out with architectural elements. Something like this could never have been just an afterthought."

Jane's wish for her bedroom was simple. "I wanted it to be a wonderful place to wake up in." Still, it shouldn't be too surprising that the master bedroom is, well, surprising. The room is paneled with antique gold-hued oak from an English manor. "We abandoned our neutral theme because the paneling was so beautiful and provides the right elements of coziness," says Eubanks.

But really, finding the right elements is the hallmark of the whole condo; it's what imbues this large space with warmth and personality. And then there are those Houston views. ■

Architect: Ed Eubanks **Interior designer:** Stacy Graubart

Regional contributor: Helen Thompson

For more information, see the Reader's Resource on page 144.