

terrace for two

New York, New York, USA
Aardvarchitecture

A view of New York's Central Park and its urban woodlands, lawns, lakes, and refreshing greenery amid the grey heart of Manhattan is rare enough, but when that view makes up your entire living room window, you know you've found somewhere very special indeed. This penthouse, situated on the northwestern edge of Central Park, is surrounded by extraordinary uninterrupted views to the south, west and north; many of which capture the verdant splendor of New York's most famous park. The apartment is set so high on the city's skyline that you don't notice the noise, the traffic, and the madness. All you can see is a serene blanket of green. It is its own micro-oasis in the heart of the buzzing metropolis.

The apartment's original organization of rooms was based on a typical 1920s pinwheel structure. Efficient and intelligent, this floor plan showed great potential, including the promise of offering an aesthetically pleasing spatial continuity right through the apartment these oblique view lines. On the down side, the facade openings and existing windows did little to extend those suggested view lines out towards the surrounding skyline.

Despite the apparent challenges, the architecture firm responsible for the penthouse's transition from dated to daring was undaunted. The architects knew that the apartment's best assets were these priceless vistas. After all, when you are privy to such perspectives, it's only natural to want to frame them as a form of living art. So they set about prioritizing them in the program. However, in doing so they came across an unexpected dilemma: how to create a seamless flow and balance between the smaller details of the interior and the grander details—and scale—of the deep, urban views?

The solution? An apartment in which the views weren't shut off and framed like a painting behind glass but connected to the living space by the use of indoor/outdoor areas, including a stylish wraparound terrace. In this way, the

apartment residents could 'connect' to the city and its myriad vistas, and form a relationship with Manhattan that was more meaningful than just a mansion in the sky. The relationship between interior and perspective became an almost intimate one. This was achieved by reconfiguring the spaces so that they embraced the view, and also flowed out to the terrace, leading people from inside to out, from glassed-in view to full-blown real-life skyline.

The master bathroom, for example, was originally separated from the west-facing terrace by a closet. By removing this closet, cutting a new opening into the brick cavity wall façade, and then positioning the bathtub immediately next to the new window, the experience of bathing was made far more dramatic. More importantly, the dialogue, and thus the relationship, between interior and skyline was strengthened. The bathroom was a mammoth task in itself, as the solid stone slab bathtub and shower basin, which was prefabricated in Germany, had to be shipped to the US in jigsaw puzzle-like pieces, and slowly installed over the course of two days. The coordination of things like plumbing and dimensional tolerances, all the responsibility of the architect, was an immense challenge.

The relationship between interior and exterior was further articulated by the redesign of the terrace, undoubtedly the apartment's next best feature. By changing the heights of the window sills and enlarging the openings, a datum was created that links both sides of the wall and connects the two environments.



Photography: Paul Rivera archphoto



Planters for the garden were integrated into built-ins (in the form of cubic stainless steel containers), and encouraged the line of sight from terrace greenery to Central Park splendor. A series of wooden boxes surrounding these planters conceal an irrigation system, outdoor speakers, air-conditioning exhaust outlets, and strip lighting, which creates a continuous glow at the base of the terrace wall at night and provides adequate exterior lighting without competing with the lights of the skyline. A stainless steel cable trellis system on the south and west terrace walls extends the layer of plant life upwards, so that the built-ins and the garden they house are read as a continuous threshold between apartment and terrace.

In the living room, meanwhile, the color palette has been reduced down to a simple, but elegant white, which is not only calming in the gunmetal grey mania of Manhattan but puts the focus firmly back on the view of Central Park and its seasonal changes, from vibrant green in summer to gold in fall and handsome black in the middle of winter. No matter what the season, the mood or light of the skyline, or even the weather, the apartment captures New York's beauty in all its grandeur and glamour from a design that is subtle, but remarkable. In short, it is a cleverly designed residence that has grand rooms but few of the pretensions of its Manhattan counterparts.

