





An architect and a custom installer seamlessly and elegantly fuse three penthouse apartments into one—and make the hidden technologies work together without flaw.

# SOPHISTICATED Synchronicity

ON HOLIDAYS, MORE THAN 20 FAMILY MEMBERS—THE HOMEOWNERS, THEIR offspring, and their grandchildren—gather in this New York pied-a-terre. But the size of the family holiday headcount is nothing compared with the RSVP numbers for the many charity events the penthouse owners host throughout the year. Nevertheless, none of these gatherings would be possible without the complex marriage of three separate spaces.

The challenge for the design team was to combine three side-by-side apartments into a single, seamless 5,500-square-foot home—and make it all function neatly, cleanly, and comfortably as one of those “machines for living,” as advocated by the classic modern architect Le Corbusier. The homeowners also required that the reconfigured floor plan accommodate their multimillion-dollar art collection, which includes works by Jackson Pollock, Ellsworth Kelly, and Jean-Michel Basquiat. Of course the seamless integration of all of the technological wizardry, plus the coordination of HVAC and plumbing systems into the 1930s building, was a given. Enter architects David

BY LOUIS POSTEL • PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILLIAM J. PSOLKA



*Above: The study, which is fronted with a 2-inch-thick sycamore pocket door that separates the space from the foyer, is as comfortable as the main living room. Both rooms boast an embuya wood and parchment panel design scheme. Previous spread: Architects David Estreich and Brian Blackburn fused three apartments into one large, cohesive space. Robert Modica of Electronics Design Group designed the whole-house A/V distribution and Crestron automation systems. To emphasize the height of the walls, the designer used a reveal at the bottom rather than base molding; this feature also helps accommodate the large-scale artwork. Window treatments are limited to motorized shades that help protect the artwork from the harsh and damaging rays of the sun.*

Estreich and Brian Blackburn of David Estreich Architects in New York—an architecture firm that has been creating and enhancing various residences for the homeowners for the past 20 years—and custom installer Robert Modica of Electronics Design Group (EDG) in Piscataway, N.J.

THE HOME REVOLVES AROUND THE CONFIGURATION of a U-shaped floor plan that joins all the rooms together. As you exit the elevator, you enter the first vertical leg of the U-shaped layout—the foyer, which leads to the study. To the right is the art gallery, which forms the bottom portion of the U. The living room is located in the middle, and affords glamorous penthouse views from the terrace. Central Park is just below. Outside this ingenious floor plan stand the master suite, the kitchen, sev-





*"Our greatest reward for this project was exceeding our clients' expectations."*

—Robert Modica, custom installer



*In the kitchen, the architects have blended a series of contrasting elements. A walnut island is surrounded by aluminum-fronted cabinets. The stainless steel tiles on the backsplash—arranged in a checkerboard pattern—contrast with the sleek custom range hood. Countertops are quartz, an elegant and nearly indestructible material. The oversized windows reveal a view of the eastern skyline.*

eral guest bedrooms, and the extensive exercise room.

The home's designated gallery space lends the feel of a New York art gallery thanks to the shadow line, or reveal, at the top and bottom of the walls. The reveal, which is difficult to execute flawlessly, replaces traditional molding and cornices. Moldings, say the architects, hide mistakes and irregularities among walls, ceilings, and floors, and can distract from the artwork at hand.

Ron Bacchi of Lico Contracting Inc. deserves much of the credit for this master craftsmanship—for uniting three apartments into a cohesive whole and for handling all of the finish work, cabinetry, and millwork. Bacchi's fine craftsmanship allowed EDG to "mesh our technology into an elegant surrounding," says custom installer Modica.



*"It was a privilege to design a gallery for such works of art. Making it a warm family home at the same time was a challenge."*

—Brian Blackburn, architect and designer





*Windows in the master bathroom become opaque and private with the touch of a button. A special gas sandwiched between two layers of glass becomes activated when electrical current passes through, which causes the gas molecules to reorganize themselves and create a visible fog. When the current is turned off, the gas becomes invisible again.*

Another element that elevates the gallery in terms of sophistication is the fiber-optic lighting, which is perfectly positioned to highlight the art. Because concealed illumination units produce and distribute light down the fibers, the artwork is subjected only to light—not to the damaging heat that's created by traditional light bulbs.

Behind the scenes are rivers of hidden wiring that Estreich and Blackburn, in concert with Modica, retrofitted into this 1930s building. Not only did they have to create ways to run the fiber optics, but they also had to design a plan to network the lighting and security systems, computers, home entertainment system, and motorized shades so everything could be controlled via Crestron touchscreens. Of course, central air conditioning did not exist when the building was built in the 1930s, so the

elaborate ductwork and condensers had to be concealed as well.

To show off the penthouse's modern art collection, the walls are finished in old-world Venetian stucco, which has the seemingly magical property of creating a matte look in one lighting situation and a glossy appearance in another. Other subtle juxtapositions and enticing touches are evident throughout: aluminum and walnut cabinets in the kitchen; limestone flooring that contrasts with the living room's wenge TV cabinet; windows that become opaque for privacy in the master bath; a 50-inch Sony flat-screen TV in the bedroom, framed with a metal grille to conceal wiring; and massive 2-inch-thick sycamore pocket doors in the study. A simple tap on the Crestron touchscreen fully controls all of these amenities without worry.

The current living room comprises the former living



## TECH TALK: A NEW YORK CITY PENTHOUSE

With this installation, the biggest challenge facing Robert Modica, systems sales and design manager for Electronics Design Group in Piscataway, N.J., was space. Finding room for the A/V electronics, and especially the lighting controls, was the first obstacle. Dealing with all of the heat generated by the gear, which had to remain completely out of sight, simply added to the project's complexity.

A more interesting challenge, though, was the living room's surround-sound system. Original plans called for typical in-ceiling speakers, all powered by an integrated A/V receiver. But, as is so often the case, technology and interior design came into conflict, and technology was forced to conform. "The designers wouldn't allow anything to be visible," Modica recalls. "So we went with Sound Advance SA2 speakers that are designed to be installed behind the wall finish and become totally invisible once they're installed." [We must point out that using ceiling-mounted SA2s for the front channels of a home theater system compromises sound quality tremendously. Unfortunately, we can think of no better solution given the architect/interior designers' dictates.—Ed.]

The SA2 includes a special equalizer, the Sound Advance ICC Installation Compensation Circuit, designed to compensate for coloration caused by building materials and the acoustic environment. Modica and his team connected the equalizer between Rotel's RSP-1066 surround processor and RMB-1075 amplifier; the beefy RMB-1075 provides the extra power that the Sound Advance speakers require. *For a full equipment list, please visit hemagazine.com.—Dennis Burger*

### RESOURCES

**Architect and designer:** David Estreich Architects of New York, N.Y. (davidestreich.com, 212.463.0500)

**Custom Installer:** Electronics Design Group Inc. of Piscataway, N.J. (edgonline.com, 732.650.9800)

**AM/FM tuner, amplifiers, stereo receivers, surround-sound processor:** Rotel (800.370.3741, rotel.com)

**Audio switching:** Vaux Electronics (vauxelectronics.com, 480.354.5556)  
**CD changer, DVD play-**

**ers, plasma TVs, and satellite receivers:** Sony (800.222.7669, sony.com)

**In-wall and ceiling speakers and subwoofers:** Sonance (800.582.7777, sonance.com), Sound Advance (800.592.4644, soundadvance.com), Triad (triadspeakers.com, 503.256.2600)

**LCD TVs:** Sharp (800.BE.SHARP, sharpusa.com)

**Lighting control:** Lutron (610.282.3800, lutron.com)

**Racks:** Middle Atlantic (973.839.1011, middleatlantic.com)

**S-VHS VCRs:** JVC (800.247.3608, jvc.com)

**Touchscreen remotes:** Crestron (800.237.2041, crestron.com)

room of one apartment and the bedroom of another. "So often you can go into apartments and see how they were just stuck together," says Estreich. "We organized it to look like it was always this way."

In the living room, the unforeseen obstacle in creating an entertainment space involved the light streaming in from the direction of Central Park, which created reflections on the TV screen. To remedy the problem, the architects positioned the Sony 50-inch plasma TV with its back to the windows and installed solar shades. The television is encased in a custom-designed wenge cabinet with a wavelike, ribbed exterior, and floats in and out of the cabinet magically thanks to an elite motorization setup.

THROUGHOUT the house, the owners listen to their favorite music through Sound Advance SA2 invisible speakers. Unlike conventional in-walls, the SA2s truly are invisible—they have a surface that looks and feels like drywall, and are taped into the wall just like a dry-wall patch. Crestron touchscreens control the multiroom audio system.

But what about the future? Can this 1930s building handle the new technologies that continue to flood the marketplace? Modica says this home's seamless design and technological infrastructure will hold up well for years.

"We made all the wiring redundant in case we need to do something else," he says. "And one advantage of the Crestron control system is that you can always add features—satellite radio, for example, and more high-definition content from cable providers. We're constantly augmenting and updating." *For a full list of interiors resources, please visit hemagazine.com.* **HE**



Two disparate lighting controllers—one a professional museum-style fiber-optic system, the other a traditional residential Lutron HomeWorks system—had to be integrated seamlessly via the Crestron touchpanels.