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ERIC HAUSMAN PHOTOS

In Chris Taggart's kitchen, sleek finishes keep things clean and crisp, while pendants and stools look as if they came straight from the factory floor.

# GOING UP

## Penthouse mixes rustic, modern for a warmer life at the top

BY **TATE GUNNERSON**  
Tribune Newspapers

"This is the penthouse, so we wanted to be sure and keep things light and airy," says interior designer Melissa Lewis, describing Chris Taggart's seventh-floor condo in Chicago.

With a big balcony off the living room overlooking the city, private elevator access and plenty of room for entertaining,

the penthouse checked every box on Taggart's wish list when he began searching for a new home after a lengthy work assignment in Singapore. Adding personality to the empty white box, however, was not in his wheelhouse. Acting on a referral from his real estate agent, Taggart hired Lewis and her business partner, Cari Giannoulis, of LG Interiors to select color and furnishings. "Melissa is from Houston, I'm from Atlanta and our Southern style kind

of matched," Taggart explains. "I wanted a clean and modern space that was also comfortable. It's a home, not a museum, and Melissa understood that right from the start."

The designers' template for the project can be found in the entry foyer, where a colorful runner made of dyed cowhide makes a bold statement against the wood floors, which have been stained in a warm gray tone that has been carried throughout

the house. Likewise, an accent wall clad in a custom burlap wall covering by artist Anna Wolfson introduces texture — another key ingredient in the rich stew of influences that the designers brought together. "The foyer is your introduction to the space, so we wanted it to feel welcoming, with some pizzazz and visual interest," Giannoulis says.

Because the designers were involved early in the project, they were able to select



Designer Melissa Lewis of LG Interiors says a painting can add color, texture and life to a white box apartment.



A dyed cowhide rug in the foyer of the penthouse raises the energy level with bright color, and an industrial-style console sets up the apartment's mix of rustic and sleek elements.

finishes and make custom alterations throughout. For the kitchen, they chose Italian cabinetry with a laminate veneer and charcoal engineered-stone countertops with a full-height backsplash. Over the center island, there is a chandelier made from an old stoplight. "It gives the place some historic personality and soul," says Lewis.

The designers used that juxtaposition of modern and rustic elements throughout the space. For the living room, they designed a floating, modern white media cabinet made of reclaimed wood. In the master bedroom, a barn-style door can easily be adjusted to conceal the closet, master bathroom or even the TV in the wall. "We were able to balance warmth with modernity," Giannoulis explains.

The designers also balanced style with durability. For example, the casual observer might never guess that the sleek sectional sofa in the living room is covered in Perennials outdoor fabric. "Not to profile, but single dudes aren't always the cleanest people on the block," Lewis explains. "Chris' plan was to entertain quite a bit, and if you can easily 409 a red wine stain out, it'll make you want to entertain even more."

The great room also includes a dining area with a custom banquette and a pair of Eames shell chairs. A hot pink abstract painting by artist Scott Reeder adds color and texture to the room's palette of warm grays. "Neutrals can fall flat if there's not some patina or some sort of textural element," Giannoulis says.

That approach has been carried into the master bedroom, where the designers brought in a neutral grass-cloth wall covering and a plush boiled wool rug from Oscar Isberian that makes stepping out of bed a sensuous, tactile experience. "It's so soft, it's as if you're walking on cashmere," Giannoulis says.

In the nearby master bathroom, the designers created a wet room with a large shower and soaker tub. Stamped concrete tile with black grout provides a warm contrast to the contemporary vanity and fixtures. "The contrasting grout really pulls the personality through," Lewis says. "A nice thing about concrete is that it will patina over time, so the more you use, the more worn and warm it will look."

Although Taggart is thrilled with the

designers' work, his plans to live there full time were dashed when an opportunity arose for him to transfer to London. "As much as I hated leaving Chicago for the second time, London is a great place, and it was too hard to say no to," Taggart explains, noting that he enjoys having a place to stay in Chicago during his regular state-side visits.

In fact, Taggart is so happy with the overall design that he is already thinking about doing it again. "We took a few detours here and there, but it was a really fun experience working with them," Taggart explains. "They made it fun, and I'm really happy and proud of the end product."

Tate Gunnerson is a freelance writer.