

APARTMENT LIFE: Smart Ideas for Small Spaces

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Apartment, p.118*

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Easy Modern

AT HOME ON NOB HILL

San Francisco designer Jiun Ho's precision-crafted renovation of a landmark apartment makes room for family heirlooms and a collection of modern art.

In the living room, a suite of 1959 lithographs by Spanish artist Antoni Tàpies and a pair of Eames *Aluminum* lounge chairs from Knoll strike a modern note next to the family antiques, including a carved oak German side table dating from the 1700s. The porcelain bird sculpture perched on the rustic wood coffee table from India is by noted Korean artist Kim Yik Young; the *Nyonya* sofa is from Jiun Ho's own collection.



The most charismatic homes are those where the architecture as well as the occupant's history, personality and style are allowed to

shine through. That's the case with the San Francisco apartment that designer Jiun Ho renovated in a classic 1927 Nob Hill building. The owner, a Bay Area biotech executive, is something of a Renaissance man. He grew up in Stuttgart, Germany, the son of an art-collecting businessman father and professional-violinist mother, and was educated as a scientist and engineer. He also trained as a classical pianist. His passions include collecting serious antiques as well as important 20th-century art.

Ho's task in renovating the 1,500-square-foot co-op was to strike a balance between contemporary furniture and antique objects, traditional architectural details and museum-quality modern art—and to create enough lightness and space for the mix to come through. “He wanted the interior to reflect his personality,” the Malaysian-born Ho says of the owner. “He’s an accomplished scientist. And as a German engineer, he likes things to be very precise.”

The owner bought the 12th-floor space in an ornate peach-hued Spanish Baroque-style building designed by Weeks and Day, the architects of San Francisco's famed Mark Hopkins and Huntington hotels (which are both neighbors). The biggest draw was the unit's stunning views from expansive windows and a terrace: Coit Tower, the Golden Gate Bridge, the Gothic belfries of Grace Cathedral across the street. But the space hadn't been touched in decades. (Ho recalls outdated paint colors and Laura Ashley floral wallpaper.)

This page: The view from the dining room: The owner, a classically trained pianist, enjoys tickling the ivories of his Steinway grand. On the walls are two of the room's ten Tàpies lithographs, at left, and a painting by David Ortins. Opposite: In another part of the living room, a rustic 18th-century oak table—the owner's childhood desk—holds a Ming Dynasty vase; lithographs are by Tàpies.

PRODUCED BY SUSAN TYREE VICTORIA. PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATTHEW MILLMAN. WRITTEN BY RAUL BARRENECHE.







Like many other homeowners, Ho's client initially thought he could tackle what seemed like a minimal renovation on his own and began working with

a local contractor. He soon realized he couldn't pull it off without professional design help and called Ho, whom he knew socially.

Ho cleaned up the surviving baseboards, crowns and doorways and re-created the profiles of missing and damaged moldings to match the originals. He opened up plaster walls and ceilings to stealthily install modern conveniences—like speakers and recessed lighting—and built out coves above the windows to hide the hardware for new motorized fabric shades. In some cases, Ho added clearly contemporary flourishes, like the sleek custom nickel-plated radiator and air-conditioning grilles throughout the apartment. The original built-in shelving and cupboards in the dining room, refinished and repainted, got a contemporary twist with sculptural pulls designed by Philippe Starck.

The client, who is fond of his inherited European pieces, wanted his collection of significant modern art to stand out, so he vetoed color on the walls. Ho chose Benjamin Moore's Designer White, a favorite of many design pros for its crispness and light-reflecting qualities. Deferring to the homeowner's art collection also meant sticking to fewer pieces of furniture. But Ho had to make sure there was enough room for one large item: his musically inclined client's Steinway grand piano.

This page: Designer Jiun Ho created a custom rug that picks up colors from the dining room's furnishings, which include a Mario Bellini table from Cassina, Mies van der Rohe chairs from Knoll and Ingo Mauer's *Birdie* chandelier. The artworks, from left, are by Donald Sultan and Julian Lethbridge. Opposite: In a solarium sitting area, a daybed and a side chair designed by Ho mix with vintage tables and an heirloom rug.



Like a curator, Ho combed through the homeowner's collections of vintage and antique furniture, objects and art to furnish the newly renovated rooms.

Many pieces are family heirlooms with great personal significance for Ho's client. The 18th-century oak side table in the living room was his childhood desk in Germany; as an infant he crawled on the rug that now livens up a sunny, glass-enclosed sitting area. Throughout the home, pairings of modern and traditional mix effortlessly: Mies van der Rohe chairs and a 19th-century French Empire mantel clock in the dining room, a marble-topped Saarinen side table, a bed from Poltrona Frau and a rustic wood armoire that belonged to the homeowner's parents and is now in the master bedroom. "Sometimes it's tricky working with antiques and pairing them with art, but everything the client had we really liked," enthuses Ho.

Also in the mix are new purchases from local vintage shops and antiques dealers; pieces from Ho's line of furniture and lighting; and custom-designed furniture, including the master bedroom's handsome walnut nightstands with cinnamon-hued brass accents (they hold lamps by George Kovacs). Completing the picture, so to speak, is the homeowner's top-notch art collection, which includes works by a range of important 20th-century painters, from Frank Stella to Donald Sultan and Keith Haring, and prints by the likes of Roy Lichtenstein, Jim Dine and Ellsworth Kelly.

For this Renaissance man, a home inspired by so many interests and tastes is the natural reflection of a complex mind. Says Ho, "The apartment really captures who he is." 🍷

See Resources, last pages.



This page (clockwise from top left): The compact kitchen cabinets are by Bulthaup (oven and hood by Miele); designer Jiun Ho in the guest room; the master bedroom holds an antique armoire, a Jiun Ho chair, a vintage carpet and art (from left) by Jim Dine and Adolf Fleischmann. Opposite: Bed by Poltrona Frau, custom nightstands by Ho, art (from left) by Eduardo Chillida, Roy Lichtenstein and K.R.H. Sonderborg.

What the Pros Know

As in many pre-World War II homes, the original fire- and mold-resistant interior walls of this 1930s San Francisco apartment were plaster over wooden lath. Jiun Ho's renovation added several new walls, which are made of drywall over metal studs. To make the new surfaces match the originals, Ho applied four layers of plaster to the drywall—a process that took a month to complete (each coat had to dry for seven days and was sanded before the following coat could be applied). While he was at it, since the homeowner is an avid piano player, Ho installed R-13 foam acoustical insulation between the studs of the new walls. The insulation needed several days to dry before the drywall could be installed over it. The new walls were then painted—in Benjamin Moore's popular Designer White. The original surfaces were in excellent condition and did not require any repair patching or even priming.

