



IN THE DETAILS From top: A luminous plaster panel connects the kitchen and dining room spaces; rift-sawn oak floors, used throughout the condo, are a companion to the precisely detailed millwork in the master bedroom.



AUSTIN

OUTSIDE THE BOX

An Austin condo defies its confines and takes shape in a way that celebrates craft and materials.

By Helen Thompson
Photography by Casey Dunn

You could say that a condo in a high-rise building is the embodiment of the first three dimensions, defined by length, width and height. But when it comes to dimensionality—the unquantifiable quality that bestows personality on the geometries that enclose the steel, concrete and glass space—most condominiums are sadly lacking. This was the conundrum faced by an architectural team commissioned to transform a 3,200-square-foot raw shell on the 29th floor of Austin's downtown W Residences into a three-bedroom, three-bath home. “Unless the unit is on the corner, all we have are parallel planes with windows between a floor and a ceiling,” says Gary Furman. **CONTINUED...**



WORKING WITH WOOD
From left: Lindsey Adelman's Agnes chandelier shines a light on the dark walnut top of the Minotti dining table; the finely grained rosewood paneling in the living room screen is repeated in the Ralph Pucci rosewood console in the dining room.

...CONTINUED The architect—along with Philip Keil, his partner in their eponymous firm—teamed with Wendy Dunnam Tita, director of interior architecture for the Austin firm Page, to transform an uninspired space into one that surpassed its physical limitations.

The homeowner and the architects weren't about to let a small thing like walls and windows limit the design. And they certainly weren't going to resort to the predictable space-defining default: rug and furniture placement. "A condo becomes an exercise in spacemaking and details," says Keil. Fortunately, he had been studying the work of late Venetian architect Carlo Scarpa, who

had a predilection for incorporating sensuous materials and fine craft into buildings, many of which were renovations of historically significant structures such as the Museo di Castelvecchio in Verona, Italy. "We were interested in how Scarpa joined materials such as gorgeous plasters, tiles and metals—the detailing is so rational that it sets up the rules of the project," explains Keil.

"This was a chance," says Dunnam Tita, "to bring the feeling of a crafted custom home to a downtown condominium setting." Trained as an architect, Dunnam Tita worked with Keil and Furman to set the tone with color and materials. The team opted for a palette of tasty hues—shades of butter, mushroom

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...CONTINUED and salt unify the separate spaces. “This isn’t an open floor plan,” notes Dunnam Tita. Instead, areas are delineated with screens, such as the one that sets apart the living room from the dining area and kitchen. The screen’s composition—squares and rectangles variously of rosewood, patinaed brass and plaster—repeats itself everywhere, probably most spectacularly in a giant “ribbon” of mushroom-colored plaster that starts at the kitchen wall and extends to the ceiling, where it then stretches into the dining room to become a flat canopy over the dining room table. Its cloudy plane connects the two rooms but also establishes an intimate space where dining occurs. The lustrous panel stops just before it reaches the floor-to-ceiling window and directs a visitor’s gaze into the cityscape.

The grid is a motif throughout the home, turning up in the precisely crafted rift-sawn oak built-ins in the living room, the built-ins behind the bed, and cabinets and an oversize frame around the vanity in the master bath. The rectangular panel is used most glamorously in the master bath’s shower. It is a monument to the rectangle, enclosed by slabs of seductively grained Silverthorn travertine marble. The



MIXING METALS Clockwise from top right: The matte black Tom Dixon pendants in the kitchen are a dramatic contrast to the soft-white cabinetry; rosewood returns as a theme in the cabinet below the bathroom vanity; blackened steel is featured throughout the home, including as an accent near the shower.



travertine is another tribute to Scarpa, who was known for his imaginative use of the material. “Scarpa layered his interiors, and that was the approach we took for this condo,” says Keil. “It was a way we could add to the complex urban fabric.” For a condo in downtown Austin, the strategy produced a home that’s so much more than a wall of windows in an urban high-rise. Its brainy but sensual complexity pays homage to urban life, the power of which is revealed in measured doses of deeply thought-out interior architecture. fkarchitects.net; pagethink.com ■