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Kelly Weldon and Michael Smith take a bow in the beautifully redesigned kitchen.



ing—a tricky task made more difficult by the special restrictions.

Realizing she would need a hand with this and other aspects of the renovation, Kelly reached out to her good friend, Michael Smith of Michael Smith Architects, for assistance. A firm principal with almost two decades of experience, Kelly knew that Michael would be the perfect partner in her quest to restore the San Remo space to its former glory. “Being brought on to the project by Kelly was really a treat,” says Michael from his office in Norwalk, CT. “The San Remo is one of the most iconic fixtures in New York City, so we wanted to do what we could to restore some of the pre-war details.”

As the team worked on the space, they found that the restoration process often required some creativity. For example, there was a large exhaust vent in the kitchen that they were not able to move. “That exhaust vent was one of the biggest design challenges we had going in,” Michael says. “After discussing the alternatives, we realized our only choice was to hide it, so we built a column around it. Once we added other details, such as the countertop and island, it blended right in.”

Finding the Perfect Piece

As the construction was taking place, Kelly worked hard to find the right furnishings for the apartment. Because she had collaborated previously with the homeowner on other residences, she had become familiar enough with his tastes that he respected her judgment implicitly. And that, according to Kelly, made the task of decorating an incredibly rewarding experience. “I was really fortunate in that,” she says. “Even though this was the client’s main residence, he travelled quite a bit for his job. So he placed an extraordinary amount of trust in me when it came to what pieces to use.”

Taking cues from the space’s historic vibe, the design team decided to incorporate vintage elements in some of the more modern pieces that Kelly selected. Doing so would not only give the space some much-needed warmth, it would also be a nod to some of the old-world charm the apartment exuded.

Nowhere was this design strategy more evident than in the foyer, where visitors are greeted by a warm mixture of textures and styles spanning many centuries. The brightly colored wallpaper on the wall blends perfectly with the 16th-century castle chairs that Kelly had custom upholstered with zebra print. Meanwhile, a 17th-century trestle table is featured with a rare framed photograph of Andy Warhol and Bianca Jagger perfectly positioned on the wall above it.

“The foyer was originally very dark,” Kelly explains, “so we wanted to brighten up the space as much as possible. The golden tones with the wallpaper and ceiling were by design, to add some warm elegance to the area.”

In the dining area, she deftly paired two new Ralph Lauren chairs with ones made in the 18th century, while on the wall sits a 16th-century velvet and gold tapestry that she had cut into a custom balance. To complete the look, Kelly added a 16th-century Japanese screen, with gold leaves woven throughout on the wall.

During the decoration phase, Kelly often pushed herself to locate the right furnishing, no matter where the search might have led her. In many cases, as with the bathroom tub and the foyer’s rug, the pieces were custom made. But often she would be on location hunting for the perfect piece herself—which meant she often found herself in some pretty unusual spots. “Among the most unique things in the study are the end tables,” she says. “Everyone loves them, but



To hide the large exhaust vent that dominated much of the available space in the kitchen, Kelly and Michael built a column around it.

Right: The custom-made tub in the guest bathroom was specially designed to have a vintage vibe.



honestly they are probably among the least expensive items in the room.” Indeed, she sheepishly admits that she found them in a garden shop. “As odd as it sounds, they just work with the custom upholstered chairs and antique furniture.”

A Space Fit for a Rock Star

Overall, the project took four years to complete. And, while the timing may seem drawn out for some, Kelly explains it was the perfect scenario for the client because it allowed the team the opportunity to build the design layers needed to finish each room.

The patience and planning paid off, as the client was thrilled with the results: an elegant yet approachable residence truly worthy of the San Remo’s glamour-filled past. And, for Kelly and Michael, that made the long process to completion worth it. “We were grateful we got the time we needed to find the right piece for every room,” concludes Michael. “No matter if it was vintage furnishing or the perfect custom molding, we wanted to make sure everything was right for the customer.”

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