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WARM EMBRACE

Nestled in textured ambience, a Lincoln Park abode becomes a tranquil haven.

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Interior Design: Emily Millman, Emily Millman Design Home Builder: Patrick Gibbons, Thady Construction, LLC
Landscape Architecture: Sean Kelley, Reveal Design, LLC

There is a razor-sharp energy to city living, set against a backdrop of traffic noise and towering masses of steel, glass and concrete. For a time, Aim and Sean Duff savored that exhilarating edge from their downtown Chicago condo. But as the years passed, the couple began craving spaces cushioned from the bustle and bluster. “Since we travel a lot, we wanted a home that felt more like a retreat,” Sean explains. “We also didn’t want things to feel so perfect,” Aim adds. “We wanted it to be effortlessly beautiful.”

They found their change of scenery in a Lincoln Park abode a step removed from the city’s busy core. “It was very important for them that the interiors weren’t obviously a Chicago home,” explains designer Emily Millman, who was tasked with cultivating a true urban oasis. “They wanted to feel shrouded in softness, both physically and visually.”

The residence was still in the early framing stages when the Duffs purchased it, which freed up room for customization. Together with general contractor and developer Patrick Gibbons, Millman focused on softening the original interior plan. Larger windows, skylights and carefully mapped lighting design bathe the dwelling in a soft aura. Square case openings connecting the living room, dining area, kitchen and family room were replaced with a series of archways that frame the main floor’s procession of spaces with graceful curvatures. They also trimmed down the kitchen’s layout by replacing a heavy block of cabinetry with a lounge, turning the pass-through corridor into an intimate alcove for gathering.

An array of earthy, tactile materials further dissolves the interior’s white-box modernity. “When a home is too minimal and contemporary, it can tend to lean cold,” the designer explains. “Natural stones and expressive woods bring that touch of nature.” Cue white oak herringbone floors, limestone fireplaces in the living and family rooms, and veined marble slabs lining the bathroom vanities.

Textured finishes also blanket the walls and ceilings, like the earthy Venetian plaster coating the main floor and stairwell. When sunlight pours through, the space feels tucked inside a shell of warmth. The paper-backed wool swaddling the home office’s walls “helps with

the sound reverberation, as acoustics became an issue,” Millman notes. And for the couple’s bedroom, a crinkled linen wallcovering “really envelops you in the space,” she adds.

A blur of pale hues threads throughout, creating a softness reflected in the numerous custom furnishings. For these pieces, the designer favored an arched line and softened edge, from plush, sinkable sofas with curved or globular silhouettes to rounded tables that beckon guests to gather closer. Millman also embraced raw materials, like the solid travertine dining table custom made in Belgium, its surface gently honed so “you can still see all the beautiful crevices and crystals within the stone,” Aim notes. Textiles in turn soothe the eye, with floors covered by high-pile rugs, upholstered furnishings wrapped in velvet and bouclé, and windows dressed with creamy natural linens “that have the most beautiful drape and hand,” Millman says.

Some pieces are deeply ingrained with tactile stories, such as the antique sculptor’s pedestal beneath the stairwell and the family room’s hand-carved wooden bench from the Senufo people of West Africa. Honoring Aim’s heritage, Millman also sourced furniture with roots in Mexican design history, such as the living room’s leather-slung butaque chairs—an iconic piece by midcentury Mexico-based designer Clara Porset. Other cultural nods include custom art by American artist Monica Curiel, who carves her childhood memories of Mexico into sensorial plaster works. This tangible poignancy runs throughout the couple’s entire art collection, with artists like Josh Young, Kit King, Malene Knudsen and Lauren Beck exploring abstract monochromatic textures to eloquent effect.

Turning to the outdoors, the couple wanted their garden spaces to feel “like an extension of the house with the same muted colors,” Sean says. So, landscape architect Sean Kelley reinterpreted the interior’s subdued style with “a very simple palette of white and natural ipe,” he explains. “That way the plants speak for themselves.”

A peaceful, hushed spirit now underscores the couple’s daily rhythms in Chicago. They perhaps feel it most during their early morning coffee ritual together, the clamor of the city seemingly far away within the cocooned walls of their new abode. “It’s so cozy and quiet,” Aim reflects. “It makes us pause for a moment and realize how beautiful our home is.” ■



The staircase is a lesson in elevated simplicity thanks to white oak floors from Best Floor #1 Inc. and hand-applied Venetian plaster on the ceiling and walls. The geometric artwork, *Wabi*, is by Kit King, and the floor vase is by Beverly Morrison.

A B&B Italia modular sofa set carves out relaxed lounging in the family room, further softened by a Perennials rug. Rohan Ward Designs fabricated the reeded coffee table, and the wood side table is by Jenni Kayne.





Above: Perfectly sized to fit the kitchen's cozy lounge area, the custom bouclé sofa by Yung Atelier is paired with a table by Rohan Ward Designs. The wall sconce and pendant light are by Allied Maker.

Opposite: A travertine table by Bicci de' Medici and Miyazaki Chair Factory chairs anchor the dining area, while a chandelier by Allied Maker floats above. Zirlin Interiors fabricated the Kohro linen drapery. The Monica Curiel artwork is from South Loop Loft.

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Through an archway is the streamlined kitchen, featuring custom cabinetry by Design Concepts by PRH Inc. Peca counter stools pull up to the central island, which is encompassed in Calia Stone honed white-crystal quartzite fabricated by Granite Design of Midwest.



Above: Paper-backed Holland & Sherry wool fabric cloaks the inviting home office. A chair from Montauk Sofa and custom geometric desk by Lagomorph Design sit upon a Holly Hunt rug. The white textured artwork is by Lauren Beck.

Opposite: Limestone tiles from The Fine Line imbue the primary bath with warmth. A Lambert & Fils pendant hangs over the tub by ADM Bathroom and a Thomas Serruys accent stool from Pavilion Antiques and 20th Century Design.





Above: Casamance linen wallpaper envelops the cozy primary bedroom. An Etcetera lounge chair from Artilleriet, McGuire side table and Ferm Living floor lamp create a cushy reading corner. The geometric artwork is by Monica Curiel.

Opposite: Blanketed in lush textures, the couple's bedroom features a Design Within Reach bed, Rosemary Hallgarten alpaca bouclé rug and Yung Atelier custom bench covered in Maharam fabric. The nightstand is by Disc Interiors.