



dSpace Studio and Ruth Johnson Interiors transform a Chicago penthouse with killer views into a home for an art and architecture buff

# *white light*

text: *tate gunnerson* photography: *tony soluri*



**For somebody who inhabits**

such posh digs, Jim Gearen is surprisingly low-key. "I call it the attic," the retired commercial real estate exec says with a smile. Actually, it's a 38th-floor three-bedroom penthouse in the tallest structure in Chicago's tony Lincoln Park neighborhood. Tucked into the building's mansard roof, the 4,000-square-foot space sports loftlike vaulted ceilings and arched windows and doors that frame jaw-dropping vistas of the lake and skyline. Not to mention the aerie boasts five outdoor balconies.

Always on the lookout for new projects (he has built or renovated six spaces over the past two decades), Gearen bought the then-unfinished penthouse in late 2015 and commissioned dSpace Studio, a growing architecture firm known for its refined modernist designs, to make it a home. "We wanted the in-

terior and the views to take center stage, so this was an exercise in restraint," explains founder and principal architect Kevin Toukoumidis, who collaborated with principal Tom Hagerty on the project. "The space just flows, and that's because it's so edited and carefully thought out." The design team embraced the arched windows and existing vault details, for example, mimicking the sweeping lines in a newly created doorway to the master suite. The many exposed concrete columns, on the other hand, are now artfully concealed behind interior walls and custom oak built-ins.

Gearen weighed in on every aspect of the design, including the wall color used throughout. Because this particular white contains both brown and black undertones, he explains, it pairs equally well with warm and cool colors. The European oak flooring, laid in a large-scale herringbone

pattern, does the same. Its slightly pinkish hue ("because of the iron in the soil," Gearen notes) brings out the warmth in the blanched walls and complements the built-in steel shelving that the architects recessed into arched niches in the spacious living area and the study. "You see the manufacturing process in the texture of the steel, and that was important to all of us," Hagerty explains. "The overall design of the space is pretty minimal, so we wanted the selected materials to provide a sense of depth."

The architects drew up more than a dozen plans to analyze the intersection of two arches in the living area, ultimately incorporating the steel shelving around a Port Laurent marble fireplace. The stone's sinuous veining plays off the shimmering pattern in the wool-silk rug, which anchors a sofa and loveseat covered in dark mohair and a pair of armchairs



**Previous spread:** Paint in My Head Number 10, an oil on canvas by Eloy Morales, punctuates the study of a Chicago penthouse by dSpace Studio. Built-in steel shelving augments custom oak cabinetry.

**Opposite:** In the living area, the same metal shelving surrounds a fireplace framed in Port Laurent marble.

**Near left:** A newly installed door to the master bedroom reiterates the curved geometry of the ceiling. **Top:** Artist John Kascht, a former college classmate of the client's, drew this portrait of John Lennon (the night he was shot) that hangs in the living area's piano niche.

**Bottom:** A quartz island and porcelain backsplash distinguish the open-plan kitchen.





*Left, top: The architects modified the dormer around the living area's largest window so that it more closely matches the arch of the other doors and windows in the space. Left, bottom: Slipcovered low-slung chairs garnish the minimalist master bedroom.*

*Right: A simple sectional and a leather sling chair by Frank Voznak furnish the sitting area.*

upholstered in camel-color leather. "There's a feeling of balance and harmony in every room," explains Minneapolis-based interior designer Ruth Johnson, who has worked with Gearen on many projects over the past 18 years. In the dining area, modernist shell chairs by Philippe Starck possess a sexy curve that echoes the deep window dormers, she notes, and the linear bronze and glass chandelier by Montana designer Ty Best is discreet, so that it doesn't interfere with sight lines. Custom cabinetry crafted of European oak serves as a buffet and wraps around the corner into the open kitchen—where it provides a rich counterbalance to the waterfall-style quartz island and gray-veined porcelain backsplash.

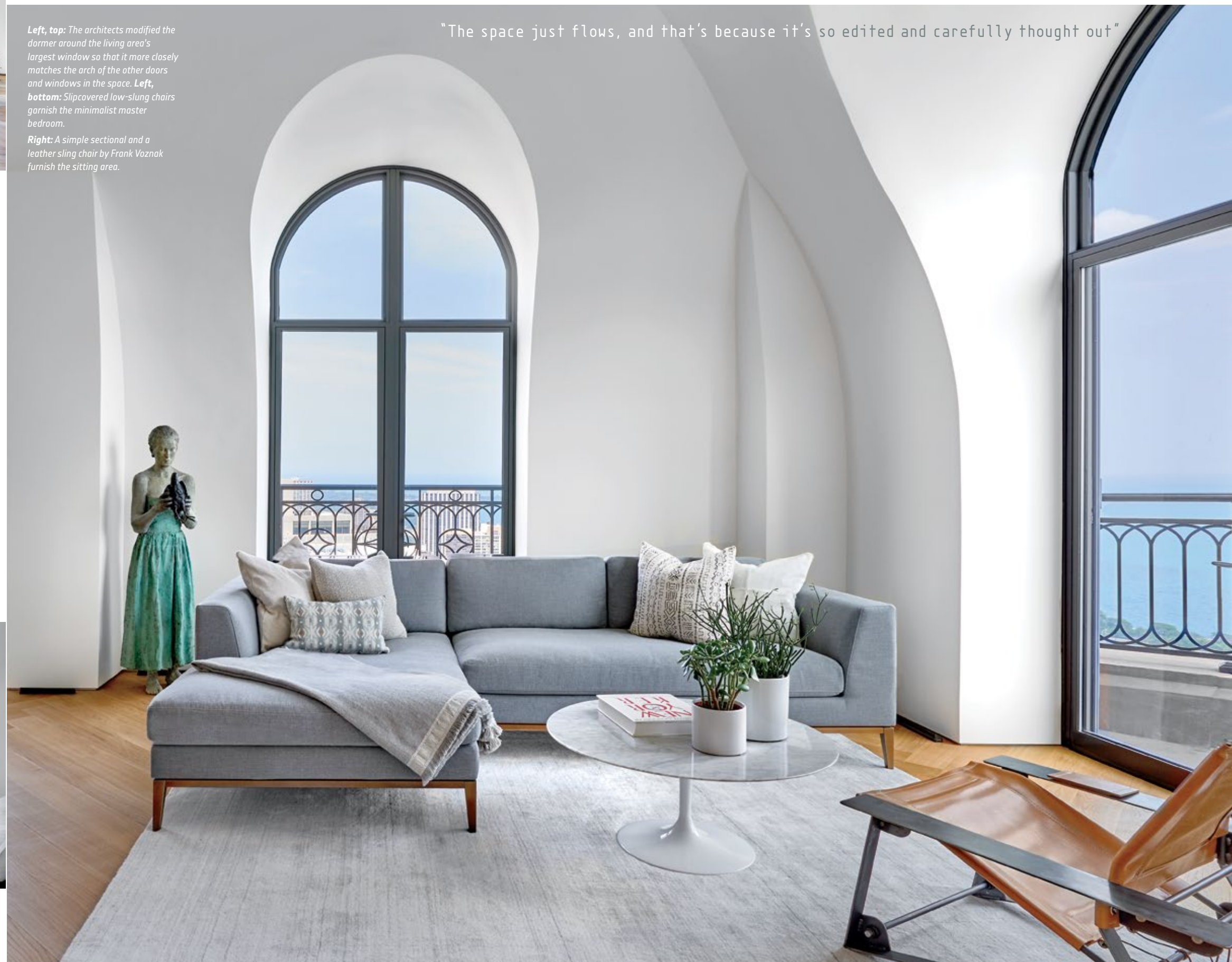
The same material palette distinguishes three of the unit's four bathrooms, most notably the mas-

ter, a serene space built around a soaker tub with front-row skyline views. The exception is a windowless interior powder room with oak-paneled walls and a floating black glass vanity. A pendant by Alison Berger supplements perimeter cove lighting, and a concealed light channel in the floor reveals illuminates a recessed marble baseboard. "Jim wanted the room to feel special and unique from the rest of the house, but it still has elements that feel cohesive," Toukoumidis says.

The sophisticated lighting concept is another element creating unity throughout the penthouse. One evening, late in the project, Gearen and the architects met at the space and, over Mediterranean takeout, tested some of the many new cutting-edge LED products on the market, evaluating color and coverage. A new design by iGuzzini made the cut; it ➤



"The space just flows, and that's because it's so edited and carefully thought out"





projects an LED “blade” that crisply frames each window with no glare whatsoever. The curved walls are also softly up-lit, and the reveals in the ceiling throughout are likewise illuminated. “The scheme creates layers of light that perfectly showcases the complex geometry,” Toukoumidis explains. “The final choice of fixtures was based on science as well as how they made the space feel.”

It certainly feels good to the homeowner. “Doing something unusual in a space with architectural integrity gives me so much joy,” Gearen explains. “I’m happy to spend time there, because I understand the design and what went into executing it.” Namely, a holism and an attentiveness to complex detailing that belies the apartment’s minimalist, contemplative vibe. ▮

#### PROJECT TEAM

**NICK IRMEN:** DSPACE STUDIO. **HOMERUN TECHNOLOGY:** AUDIOVISUAL. **GOODFRIEND MAGRUDER STRUCTURE:** STRUCTURAL ENGINEER. **MCGUIRE ENGINEERS:** MEP. **SOUNDSCAPE ENGINEERING:** ACOUSTICAL ENGINEER. **STEVEN CABINETS:** WOODWORK. **NU TILE & MARBLE:** STONework. **NORCON:** GENERAL CONTRACTOR.

#### PRODUCT SOURCES

**(STUDY)** VERPAN: PENDANT FIXTURE. **KNOLL:** TABLE. **HERMAN MILLER:** CHAIRS. **(LIVING AREA)** MONTIS AT LUMINAIRE: CHAIRS; **CORTINA:** LEATHER. **DELLAROBBA:** SOFA, LOVESEAT. **HOLLY HUNT:** SOFA AND LOVESEAT FABRIC, LAMP. **TROSCAN:** SIDE TABLE, NESTING TABLES. **STONE SOURCE:** FIREPLACE STONE. **TAMARIAN AT WOVEN ARTS:** RUG. **(KITCHEN)** HOLLY HUNT: PENDANTS. **CAESARSTONE:** COUNTERTOP. **FIANDRE AT TRANSCERAMICA:** BACKSPLASH. **BERTAZZONI AT ABT:** STOVE. **AVENUE METAL CO.:** CUSTOM VENT HOOD. **(DINING AREA)** CASTE AT HOLLY HUNT: PENDANT. **BONALDO AT CASA SPAZIO:** TABLE. **CASSINA AT WPA CHICAGO:** CHAIRS. **(BEDROOM)** PRESSOTO AT CASA SPAZIO: BED. **MONTIS AT LUMINAIRE:** LOUNGE CHAIRS; **HOLLY HUNT:** FABRIC. **(SITTING AREA)** RH MODERN: SECTIONAL, RUG. **PERENNIALS:** SECTIONAL FABRIC. **KNOLL:** TABLE. **BOLT & HIDE AT SCOUT:** CHAIR. **(MASTER BATH)** FIANDRE AT TRANSCERAMICA: FLOORING. **INTERIOR GLASS DESIGN:** CUSTOM GLASS PARTITION. **CAESARSTONE:** COUNTER. **TOTO:** SINK. **AYRE ARCHITECTURAL LIGHTING:** SCONCE. **(POWDER ROOM)** HOLLY HUNT: PENDANT. **ARTLINEA:** VANITY. **LUMINII:** LINEAR COVE LIGHTING. **(THROUGHOUT)** SHERWIN-WILLIAMS: PAINT. **EXQUISITE SURFACES:** WOOD FLOORING. **VECTOR CUSTOM FABRICATING:** CUSTOM STEEL SHELVING. **UNITED WOODWORKING:** ARCHED DOORS. **CRESCENT ELECTRIC SUPPLY COMPANY:** LIGHTING SUPPLIER. **TECH LIGHTING:** DOWNLIGHTS. **IGUZZINI:** WINDOW LIGHTING. **ECOSENSE LIGHTING:** IN-FLOOR LIGHTING. **HYDROLOGY:** BATH FIXTURES SUPPLIER. **FANTINI:** FAUCETS.

**Opposite:** A brilliant blue painting by Barbara Kreft offers a pop of color in the master suite, whose bed integrates side tables covered in Nubuck suede.

**Near left:** Porcelain faux marble paves the master bathroom, with freestanding soaking tub. **Right, top:** The study balcony offers panoramic views of the Chicago skyline, the harbor, and Lake Michigan. **Right, bottom:** Reflected artwork by Brenna Hansen depicting Gearen’s modernist cliffside retreat in Door County, Wisconsin, by architect Harry Weese, stands out against the oak-paneled walls in the powder room.