

Kentucky Continental

Exquisite, Old World inspired rooms orchestrated by Louisville interior design doyen Ben Small of Bittners rival the sweeping views from a Highlands high-rise

Written by Bridget Williams

Photography by Andrew Kung

A blank slate is an interior designer's Holy Grail, ripe with both possibilities and potential pitfalls that require deft management of a multitude of desires and demands. Fortunately, for interior designer Ben Small of Bittners, the daunting task was made easier by a top-notch team, including foreman Chris Grosskopf and lead faux painter Byron Roberts, and the homeowners, who relished in the collaborative process but were quick to defer to expert opinion. The result, some four years in the making, is absolutely exquisite in its level of architectural interest and interior design flourishes.

European ambiance is introduced the moment one steps out of the elevator and into the vestibule. A wall of beveled mirrored panels chosen, in Small's words to "add a bit of drama," are punctuated by marble columns. The vaulted ceiling is enhanced with decorative painting reminiscent of what one would expect to spy in a grand Tuscan villa; similar design elements are repeated as a disguise for the elevator door. Affixed to the mirror panels are a pair of works by Marc Chagall – a bon à tirer and an etching with aquatint – whose whimsical modernist reverie are ideally suited to the opulent environs.



In the rotunda, the graceful "everyman" figures depicted in a sculpture by Mark Kostabi extend upwards and stop just short of an antique Baccarat crystal chandelier, which is suspended from a gilded dome ceiling.



Faux painter Byron Roberts meticulously applied 24k gold leaf to the ornamental moldings on the coved crown in the dining room. The fireplace mantel was purchased in Palm Beach. Two sets of French doors lead to a large terrace overlooking Cherokee Park.

Serving as the home's central axis, a dramatic rotunda boasts mosaic tile inlay among the expanse of highly polished marble. The idea of accessing various public and private spaces from the rotunda by passing through smaller chambers was inspired by places the homeowners had visited throughout Europe. The graceful "everyman" figures depicted in a sculpture by Mark Kostabi extend upwards and stop just short of an antique Baccarat crystal chandelier, which is suspended from a gilded dome ceiling. The space serves as an introduction to a striking and consistent design element throughout the home: the extensive application of detailed wood molding and architectural ornamentation from the venerable JP Weaver Company, whose handicraft can be found in prominent buildings across North America, including the Bellagio casino in Las Vegas. The curved walls are upholstered with tone-on-tone botanical damask fabric on the outside with wood panel centerpieces given a subtly aged faux finish.

Upholstered walls with finely detailed inset panels and trumeau mirrors are also a feature of a most unique powder room, the vision for which was borne out of the homeowners' directive for Small to create a "jewel box of a space." An illuminated tray calls attention to the vaulted ceiling, while onyx tiles on the floor highlight the room's octagonal shape. An ornately carved sink is also fashioned from onyx. Crystal sconces and the gold and crystal chandelier were purchased in Palm Beach.

In a home with no shortage of superlatives, the two-story living room is certainly a standout. Framing the view with aplomb, the double arch window is dressed in an expanse of golden silk

damask with tassel fringe that incorporates the colors of the room's needlepoint rug, which was purchased from Frances Lee Jasper Oriental Rugs. Matching opposing sofas upholstered in the same fabric as the drapery sport a fringed skirt. Tucked under the stairs is a sideboard repurposed for use as a bar by the Bittners woodshop.

Ben Small designed the unique scallop detail for the underside of the staircase that leads up to a den with access to a rooftop terrace. Ensclosed in dark wood paneling, the den provides an interesting vantage point from which to survey the treetops of Cherokee Park and the architecture of the living room.

Gleaming marble floors transition to wood herringbone in the dining room, keeping room and kitchen. Each room is largely open to one another, with transitions marked by wide archways supported by decorative columns at either end. The color palette for this area of the home was derived from the rug in the keeping room – a favorite of the homeowners that was also purchased from Fran Jasper.

While it may seem nonsensical to suggest that a dining room with 24k gold leaf meticulously applied by Byron Roberts to the ornamental moldings on the coved crown represents anything but the height of formality, throughout the home it was Small's intention to create an aura of "casual elegance." "There are certainly formal elements, but the casual layout is very inviting," he added. Crystal chandeliers are suspended over a pair of dining tables, chosen over a single long table, as the arrangement is more conducive for smaller gatherings but can be quickly configured to accommodate up to 16 guests.



A pair of Lalique candelabra, one atop a marquetry commode with ormolu accents on the left and the another on an opposing oval occasional table located underneath a painting by Marc Chagall, are found in the hallway that leads from the elevator vestibule at the far end of the room to the rotunda.



Matching china cabinets on either side of the French doors in the keeping room were built by the custom shop at Bittners. The rug, purchased from Frances Lee Jasper Oriental Rugs, established the color palette for the three rooms. The custom kitchen cabinetry is from Downsview Kitchens.





Accessed from the elevator hall or the balcony den, an expansive rooftop terrace provides sweeping views of the treetops in Cherokee Park on one side and downtown skyscrapers on the other.



The double arch window in the living room is dressed in an expanse of golden silk damask with tassel fringe that incorporates the colors of the room's needlepoint rug, which was purchased from Frances Lee Jasper Oriental Rugs. Ben Small designed the unique scallop detail for the underside of the staircase.



The opulent powder room resulted from interior designer Ben Small following the homeowners' directive to create a "jewel box of a space."



Golden silk damask fabric used for the drapery, upholstered headboard and bed skirt in the master suite are complemented by a buttercup-colored silk coverlet in a diamond pattern. An ornate panel above the fireplace opens via remote control to reveal a television. Candelabra on either end of the mantle are French antiques. A finely detailed English style chinoiserie secretary along the fireplace wall is one of two fine examples in the home.

Gilt molding in the dining room transitions to a deep diamond coffered ceiling with faux finished insets in the keeping room. The wood artisans in Bittners' custom shop designed the ebony cabinetry with gilded trim detail that flank the French doors leading to a small terrace at one end of the room and fill an entire wall on the opposite side. The latter, designed by Small, conceals a television and incorporates pullout slides to allow the piece to function as a sideboard.

The master suite, a guest bedroom and a third bedroom presently used as a study are all located along a long corridor radiating from the rotunda. Resplendent with exquisite ceiling detail, paneling and trim work minus the gilt finish found in the dining room, the master suite is opulent, but still serene. Golden silk damask fabric used for the drapery, upholstered headboard and bed skirt are complemented by a buttercup-colored silk coverlet in a diamond pattern on the bed. Small introduced hues of pale green and rose via the needlepoint rug and upholstery. A pair of side tables with ormolu and inlay on either side of the bed are topped with delicate Murano glass table lamps.

An ornate panel above the fireplace opens via remote control to reveal a television. Candelabra on either end of the mantle are French antiques. A finely detailed English style chinoiserie secretary along the fireplace wall is one of two fine examples in the home. The other, a double dome burl wood version embellished with inlay and a fitted interior of pigeonholes and shelves, is located in the living room.

Accessed from the elevator hall or the balcony den, an expansive rooftop terrace provides sweeping views of the treetops in Cherokee Park on one side and downtown skyscrapers on the other. The main seating area is positioned under a large pergola. A marble-topped U-shaped serving bar is located nearby, and a host of planters with evergreen shrubbery are strategically positioned throughout the space.

Having designed many high profile residences over the course of his prolific career, Small is quick to cite this one among his most memorable and rewarding. "[The homeowners] are the most delightful couple to work with," he explained. "They are careful thinkers who grow with ideas and seek out the best way to accomplish their vision." **sl**