



In 1890, Chicago developer Charles C. Heisen purchased a lakefront lot in Potter Palmer's new Gold Coast district and built a three-story mansion resembling the Palmer residence a few doors north. The Heisen (now Frigo) home is one of only seven Gold Coast lakefront homes standing today. In 1989, these seven homes attained Chicago landmark status. This photo of Lake Shore Drive, looking north from the Drake Hotel, was taken in 1928.

The fact that Potter Palmer's name was on the home's original 1892 deed was the pièce de résistance for Art Frigo, when he first took a buyer's tour of this Chicago mansion—one of North Lake Shore Drive's sweetest treasures. It was 1989. Art found the 12,000-square-foot historic mansion divided into apartments, dilapidated, and in jeopardy.

"How can I take on such a big project and make it economically viable and at the same time not destroy the historical perspective of it?" he remembers wondering.

"I never wanted to change the façade. That would be misleading as to the mansion's original form," he says. On the other hand, he knew that the interior would have to be gutted to return it to its original form as a single-family residence.

Many of the issues, Art recalls, had to be resolved with the city's Commission on Chicago Landmarks, as well as at the state landmark preservation level. And so began the fiveyear reconstruction and redesigning of his newly acquired Lake Shore Drive home; two years were devoted to structural changes, while three were assigned to redecorating.

The initial work, Art remembers, necessitated "putting the back of the home on jacks and taking a weight-bearing wall away to build a garage. Then, we put in a back elevator in an effort to provide an entry to the top floors without jeopardizing the front entrance and staircase."

It was a complete restoration of the infrastructure—from plumbing and electrical to floors, walls, and ceilings.

"The bathrooms are miracles," Art explains. "We took out 18- to 24-inchthick retaining walls to gain enough space to accommodate new bathrooms. Jacks were used to support what was left, and then steel beams were put in to hold it all up while the work was



being done. Definitely miracles."

With these major structural changes came a total gutting of the home; when designer Kenneth Walter arrived on the

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scene, the interior was nothing more than a blank slate.

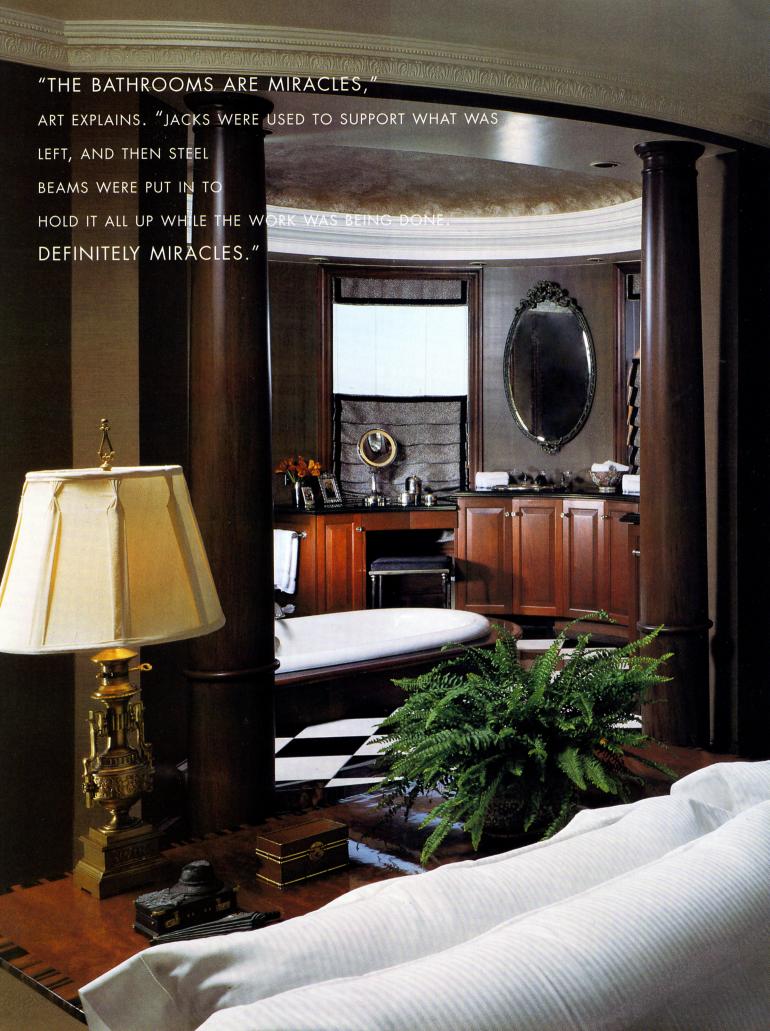
"It was just raw space when I got there," he recalls. "But it was a dream. The more I worked on it, the more I loved the house. The biggest challenge to me was the house was so dark. It is an incredible site, with the home's location and the lake right there. But after noon, there is no more light in the back of the house. So the back had to be in a palette that would glow. I worked on bouncing color back and forth until finally settling on a golden hue that would reflect light."

Art had a different challenge to contend with. "I was coming from a beautiful condo," he explains. "I combined two floors in Olympia Center, and it was very contemporary. I went from there to this. How could I adjust? There wasn't one piece I could use in this new home. I had to totally readjust my mental image."

Strangely enough, one piece of furniture made the difference. He became interested in the Biedermeier period, "an approach to furniture that provided royalty furniture to the masses," he explains. "I loved that look. I bought an armoire in that style for the living room, and that got me over the hump from contemporary to traditional."













Ken also felt strongly about the continental

The lighter fruitwood tones that helped make Beidermeier furniture popular with Europe's middle classes put the accent on comfort and simplicity of line, combined with a high regard for function—exactly the style Art was looking for.

Art also loves the masculine nature of the mansion's Italianate and Romanesque styles. "It's got solid lines, boldness," he explains. "And I give Ken the credit here. Most professional decorators have excellent taste, but not everyone has appreciation for the period. Ken knew what would be appropriate. There was a danger of erring toward the Victorian, but he had a sense for the spirit of the project. And once you cross that bridge, you're on your way."

Ken also felt strongly about the continental feeling of the house. "It was important to play up the rich European feeling," Ken says. "There was an obvious quality to the home, beginning with the arches in the front. We had Romanesque roots, and we wanted to maintain them. I wanted to let the architecture of the space dictate the layout, but I also wanted to make sure we didn't make it intimidating by over-decorating. Make it comfy, but not fussy or cluttered—not pretentious. Rich but comfortable—that was my goal."

A key piece of furniture was pivotal to the first-floor design, Ken explains. "The buttery suede sofa in the living room. Once we got that, the rest fell into place."

Not everything was so obvious. Ken says that Art loves games and sports, and that he wanted a billiard table in the middle of the living room. "I originally protested," says Ken, "but

feeling of the house. "It was important to play up the rich European feeling,"

he says.

THE BUILT-IN SILVER & CHINA CLOSET IS LIKE OPENING UP A JEWELRY BOX.

then I found it fascinating. Art became enthralled in a search for the perfect billiard table. He saw tables from different periods and in different states of disrepair. In fact, he flew to Kansas City to see a table and brought me photos of it. The man showing him the table was a plastic surgeon for billiard tables."

Also on the living room shopping list was a dartboard, which Ken incorporated into the room's design by hiding it behind a plaque which resembles a family crest or coat of arms. The surrounding area is corked and sealed with six coats of glaze to protect the wall from stray darts.

"But the most original room in the house is the round dining room," says Art. "All the mosaic around the fire-place is original. Even the cracks are authentic. I especially love the pocket doors. When I bought the home, they were frozen into the wall. We put steel beams into the threshold to hold it up while we took the walls down to release the doors. The dining room is a delight for me."

Ken was aware that though his client loves to entertain, he does not have time to cook. "But we wanted to make the kitchen functional, so a cook or chef could come in and operate easily. Although it's a small space, there's very little clutter in the kitchen," Ken says. "I've added pocket doors to close off the toaster, the microwave, and the coffee maker. It's Art's appliance garage."

He also added a built-in silver and china closet, completely lining it with





Pacific cloth, which keeps the silver from tarnishing. "It's like a jewelry box when you open it up," Ken explains.

When asked about his favorite room in the mansion, Art quickly responds with "the little turret off the master bedroom on the second floor. I read a lot, and I love the coziness—the wrap-around feeling—looking at the lake. Hands down, my favorite room."

"The architecture of the other, larger turret, created a rotunda, a perfect bathroom space," says Ken of the home's second turret. "It was a matter of just following the curves. The tub we put into the floor has a Romanesque feeling—made from a white marble called Thassos.

"Some things just established the flow of the house, and it seemed only natural to back the bedroom with the bathroom," explains Ken. "I also added a long counter with a sink, refrigerator, and upper cabinets near the dressing room, off the master bathroom. You can stand there and eat a bowl of cereal in the morning."

Convenience ... richness ... a historical perspective ... elegance ... it's all there. But Ken finds that he's proudest of the way people feel when they spend time in the home.

"It is a warm and inviting space," says Ken. "Art is a confident man, and it had to complement the place in his life he has come to." [446]

"We wanted this to be a cook's kitchen, to be functional," says Ken. Though a relatively small area, the space is extended by the addition of the island and cabinetry designed to contain clutter. The green cupboard on the left holds china (above) and silver (below).