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Top OF THE World

Designer Charles Allem maximizes the staggering views from a New Hampshire penthouse



By Jorge S. Arango + Photography by Greg Premru



Preceding pages, left: A Robert Kuo mirror abuts the gallery space that leads from the atrium garden to the living areas. Right: The living and dining space features nesting coffee tables by 1970s designer Karl Springer and a fireplace of polished tobacco travertine.

Opposite, left: The ventilation hood in the kitchen was designed by architect Lisa Muskat using stainless steel and powder-coated bronze. It hangs over a Diva de Provence oven and cooktop.

Left: Charles Allem used the steps leading to the Tel Aviv opera house as his inspiration for the 2,000-pound bar, which is stocked with a selection of Lalique, Baccarat and Riedel crystal.

Below: Eight pendant lamps from Holly Hunt hang above the dining room's 14-foot walnut table.

When the owner of a highly successful food

processing company found himself on the cusp of selling his business, he began to seriously entertain one of his favorite daydreams. "I always had this idea that when I retired I was going to build myself a glass house on top of a mountain," he says. For years, on his way to and from work in his hometown of Manchester, N.H., the business owner had passed a 17-story tower. Then one day, "like a lightning bolt, it hit me," he says. Even if the property was not in the bucolic setting of his dreams, this building offered the stupendous views he had always desired.

The penthouse had once been a glass-enclosed restaurant but was, at the time, vacant. The executive pursued the building's owners (who were trying to rent it as restaurant or office space) for a year before they finally consented to sell. All along, he had been compiling a file of color schemes and furnishings for the dwelling, among them an article on designer Charles Allem's apartment in New York on Fifth Avenue. "I

called Charles up and jokingly said, 'You have a lot of nerve designing the apartment I want,' he recalls, later inviting Allem to Manchester to view his new home.

"I never like to see pictures of anything until I walk the space," says Allem. "The design is always conceived in the first 45 minutes." What happened in those particular 45 minutes, on a quintessential New England autumn day, was the hatching of a plan for a sumptuous living space. "The place has paralyzing views," explains Allem. "It was like the Philip Johnson glass house on top of a penthouse in the sky. That imposed a spectacular type of design. You couldn't come in there with a traditional look." The color scheme was immediately obvious to Allem: "Cognac, rust, coffee and cinnamon—the colors of fall," he says.

Allem worked with Lisa Muskat, principal architect at LKM Design, on the floor plan. "The first obstacle," she says, "was that the core mechanical room for the building was in the center of the space, so we had to maintain access points for other residents through the service elevator." This determined the basic format—

12,000 square feet of living space meandering gracefully around the service elevator shaft, which Muskat isolated for the other tenants.

Central also to their plans was a bamboo-and-orchid garden requested by the client and co-designed by John Mini Distinctive Landscapes. Guests enter a 75-by-22-foot atrium garden with a water wall and a ceiling draped in steel mesh that filters the light.

"Architecturally, I like using two or three elements in a space, max," says Allem, who employed travertine, black walnut and leather in other areas, "so it can receive unique pieces and not compete." Among the standout furnishings are coffee tables by designer Karl Springer, a game table faced with embossed copper by Robert Kuo (flanked by stylized wing chairs designed by Allem) and a 1950s mixed-metal room screen Allem says came from a private club in Los Angeles. The limited palette, he adds, "makes the space restrained, reserved, disciplined. The sense of freedom comes from the light and the views."

Stairs from the garden lead up to the master suite, a





sustain that kind of weight (in addition to the tonnage of an eight-person hot tub, two huge serpentine sofas for the living room, a billiard table and a dining table of solid 4-inch-thick walnut measuring 14 by 3 feet).

Transporting the larger items—as well as countless feet of walnut, marble and mature bamboo trees—required some creative problem solving, since the materials would never fit in the small freight elevator. Two or three times during construction, police cordoned off the block, rerouting traffic so they could crane materials up to the roof terrace, where glazing panels had been removed to accept them. “That hit the local newspapers,” the client says with a chuckle.

The executive, who owns additional houses in Florida and Lake Winnepesaukee, has a large extended family and loves to entertain, which necessitated the 14-foot dining table. It also meant designing a state-of-the-art kitchen that boasts a range, cooktop and oven (including two 14,000 BTU grills) by Diva de Provence, which were customized to the owner’s specifications. Additionally, there are two Gaggenau ovens, two Sub-Zero refrigerators and two dishwashers. An onyx-topped island seats 16.

The home theater (with seating for eight) is adjacent to a noisy boiler room, so Muskat had the floor built in three heights, all on special supports to minimize vibration, then soundproofed the walls and had them padded and upholstered. All functions here and throughout the house are fully automated. Security, temperature, lighting, many of the plasma screens and

spa and a guest room, all suspended on the footprint of the apartment “like a tray,” says Muskat. Continuing on the main floor, further back, you enter a small gallery, then a lounge area that houses a bar codesigned by Muskat and Allem. Inspired by a set of stairs leading to an opera house in Tel Aviv, the bar became an organic sculpture of stacked wood faced in bronze leaf, weighing more than 2,000 pounds. Allem and Muskat had to convince the building’s owners that the tower could



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Opposite, top: The media room, elevated on special supports to eradicate vibrations from the adjacent boiler room, features large graphite drawings from Berkshire artist Philip Knoll’s *Coelacanth* series. Below: The banisters on the cantilevered stairs are American black walnut and stainless steel. The cloisonné vases on the hall chest are by Robert Kuo.

Left: A staircase from the atrium leads to the master and guest bedrooms and a spa. Another guest room beyond the enormous bamboo and the John Lacz wood sculpture opens onto the garden.

Right: The master bathroom features a sink by Muskat of poured concrete infused with a caramel color and waxed to resemble leather.

Below: In the master suite, chenille-upholstered furniture sits on a carpet woven in Tibet. The Edelman leather on the bed and ottoman inspired the bathroom's caramel color. Automated shades are of Donghia fabric. "When they are all down, you are in an amazing tent of cognac and brown fabric," says Allem.



the garden's irrigation equipment—as well as yard upon yard of custom window shades that provide shelter from midday sun—can all be controlled using an integrated Crestron system.

Upstairs, the master suite is equipped with a coffee maker and a refrigerator. "I like to make the master suite totally self-sufficient," says Allem. "It's like a hotel. If you don't want to go downstairs for two days, you have everything you need."

While inside "we created a whole new movie," says Allem, everyone agrees that the real masterpiece lies beyond the penthouse's windows. The owner has a front-row seat to New Hampshire's spectacular seasonal changes through views of the city, two rivers, a mill yard and the hills beyond; the sort of views perhaps only previously possible from a glass house perched atop a mountain. 

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