

# the lake effect

*by christine hofmann-bourque photography by janet mesic-mackie produced by barb rohm rossa*

A 26-year-old renovates his Chicago high-rise with a youthful elegance that combines luxe with low-end.

Jay Michael's condo offers up envy-inducing views of Lake Michigan, Lake Shore Drive, and the Chicago skyline.





The Drake

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Moving into a 1960s high-rise in Chicago's tony Gold Coast neighborhood gave Jay Michael the old bones he was looking for—sort of. “I have some vintage neighbors, but not so much vintage amenities,” confesses this 26-year-old, who overlooked the condo's lack of prewar architecture because of its exceptional views.

In truth, Jay was thrilled that the 2,030-square-foot condo hadn't been updated in decades and still featured ample Formica and mirrored walls. “I didn't want to pay a premium for anyone else's interior,” says Jay, who planned to gut the home and rebuild it to suit his traditional sensibility. “I have very defined taste.”

Jay, owner of a real estate company, honed that style while renovating his first condo with designers James Dolenc and Thomas Riker. When the young entrepreneur first approached



them, “I was 21, and they were so over me in 15 minutes because I had a tiny budget and a lot of questions,” Jay says. But the designers decided to take a chance. “There was just something about Jay in terms of his demeanor,” Dolenc says. “I loved his energy. He

**ABOVE LEFT: All thresholds in the condo were built 2 feet deep, providing prewar ambience and creating logical places for sconces. Jay's cozy chocolate-brown office was once the butler's pantry. LEFT: In true prewar tradition, picture-rail molding rings the living room; it's used to hang three framed Hermès scarves.**



The dining room serves up a peaceful greenish-blue hue, which designer James Dolenc calls “the fresh face of teal.” Adding soffits to the 10-foot ceilings created visual drama and a place for recessed lighting. The commercial-grade wallcovering looks like silk but is washable vinyl.

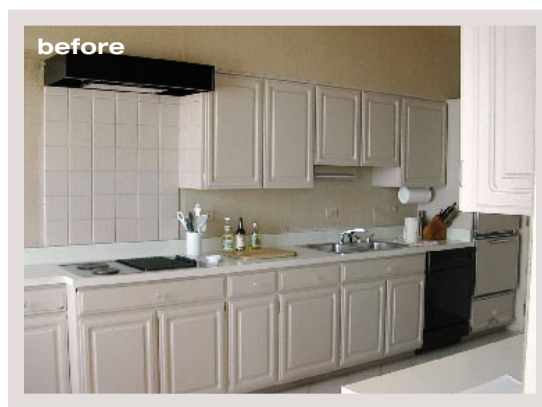


has a great eye, and that was a strong suit for me.”

After taking the eighth-floor condo down to its studs, the trio reworked the layout, turning the extra-large one-bedroom, 2½-bath condo into a more functional two-bedroom, two-bath home by sacrificing a half bath.

Then the prewar architectural deception commenced. All the thresholds were built up to 24 inches deep,

giving the walls the illusion that they’re hefty remnants of times gone by. Built-ins, paneled wood doors, and lavish custom molding—crown, picture rail, wainscoting, and baseboard—further the been-there-forever feel. Even the radiant heat in the ceiling (popular in the 1960s because it required no baseboard contraptions for vents) that limited overhead lighting options was a blessing in disguise:



**TOP:** White was the classic color choice for this traditional-style kitchen. There are no gas hookups in the building, but that didn’t stop Jay from getting a professional-style, stainless-steel cooktop: This model looks like its gas-cooking cousins, but it’s electric.

**ABOVE:** The \$20,000 restaurant-quality refrigerator had been sitting out in a local store’s floor display for several years. Jay got it for a cut-rate \$8,000 when the display was dismantled. **OPPOSITE:** A banquette gives Jay a casual alternative to the dining room. The gold-framed painting was a housewarming gift from his older brother.



### **luxe for less**

At just 26, homeowner Jay Michael is enjoying the good life on a not-so-high-end budget by knowing where to spend—and where to cut corners.

**SAVE: FLOORING.** Jay planned to cover the new wood floors in his bedrooms with carpet-quality sisal rugs. So he cleverly shaved \$5,000 off his budget by only installing the wood as a 2-foot border around the rugs; the rugs sit on the subfloor, their tops flush with the wood.

**SPLURGE AND SAVE: ART.** Jay's designer found an old Chinese prayer table on eBay for \$1,600. Jay tops it with two 16th-century Chinese urns that were \$1,000 each and two \$6 wood horses from Target. "No one comments on the urns," Jay says with a laugh, "but everyone comments on the horses."

**SAVE: PROFESSIONAL DESIGNERS.** "We're hourly," James Dolenc says of his design firm. "We don't upcharge on furniture. You don't have to spend \$1 million on furnishings if you can find a designer who works hourly and isn't so concerned with selling you the most expensive pieces."

**SPLURGE: DRAPERIES.** "They give that sense of grandeur," Dolenc says. In Jay's condo, every window has a drop soffit built in front of it to elegantly hide hardware, cords, and tracks.

**SAVE: LIGHTING.** Jay's condo is proof positive that it's easy to find beautiful, inexpensive lighting: The lamps are from Restoration Hardware and Crate & Barrel, the sconces were less than \$100 each, and the dining room chandelier is from Williams-Sonoma Home.





Cozy browns and greens reign in the guest bedroom, left, which was created by co-opting space from the navy master bedroom and capping off an underused bath.



Soffits were added to some of the 9½-foot ceilings to create the look of handsome tray ceilings. “The idea was to infuse a feel of permanence,” Dolenc says. “‘Staid’ is a good word when you’re talking about architecture.”

Traditional touches followed in the kitchen, which features custom off-white cabinets with a mix of solid- and glass-front doors and classic white-marble countertops. “We kept finishes to a minimum to harmonize the space,” Dolenc says.

Throughout the home, the soft, classic palette—mostly sage and light grays—was drawn from outside. “I wanted to feel like the lake and view were coming into my apartment,” Jay says.

His youthful style embraces the eclectic mixing of high-end luxury

(such as marble in the master bath) with bargain-basement finds. “I have a lot of junk in the house,” he says. “That’s the way I am.” Most of the hardware choices in the condo are inexpensive pieces from Restoration Hardware. In the master bedroom, black-and-white photos of Jay’s socialite grandfather with Duke Ellington and Jane Russell are displayed in frames from T.J. Maxx. And the robin’s egg art in the guest room is simply an \$80 poster from a local junk shop.

Jay says his creative high/low renovation paid off in a way all modern homeowners can appreciate: “I got the features of prewar, minus the headaches.” ■

**Designers:** James Dolenc and Thomas Riker

For more information, turn to Sources on page 118.

**ABOVE:** Because Jay sold his previous apartment fully furnished, he arrived in this condo with little more than the family pictures that cover the navy walls in the master bedroom. **OPPOSITE:** Renovation had to work around several restrictions, including the fact that the condo’s plumbing needed to stay mostly where it was. The master bath’s luxurious soaking tub came with a price tag to match: It was \$3,000 higher than usual because of the unusually small dimensions needed to tuck into the space. A delicate mosaic set into the marble floor is an elegant twist on the bath mat.

