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IN GOOD FAITH

A Midtown resident goes big with his first home, expertly turned out by friends Jennifer Reiner and Robert White of Reiner White Design Studio.

By Kate Abney | Photography by Patrick Heagney

Rolling the dice on a bold design for a Midtown condo channels sexiness and assuredness for its scholarly owner.

Confidence is sexy. We know that instinctively. We say it often. But how many of us are hesitant to live it—especially when it comes to our, well, living spaces?

Not Franco Dispenza. A licensed psychologist, counselor, advocate, Georgia State University professor and frequent contributor to academic journals—addressing such topics as gender identity, multicultural studies and social justice—the New York native (and first generation Italian-American) rented in the Atlanta market for nine years before deciding to take the plunge on a place all his own.

Midtown contained so many of his favorite haunts—Escorpion, Livingston, Midtown Art Cinema, even Starbucks—so when his real estate hunt led him to 805 Peachtree, it seemed the perfect fit. Built in 1951, the onetime IBM building was converted into condominiums in 2000, retaining many of its midcentury hallmarks, but now boasting a beautiful rooftop pool with cabanas and 117 uniquely laid-out residential units. Dispenza's particular find was a 1,080-square-foot, open-concept one-bedroom that he immediately beseeched close friends Jennifer Reiner and Robert White to come see for themselves.

Interior-design partners in the eight-year firm Reiner White Design Studio, they'd known Dispenza for years, and so welcomed the opportunity to share their wisdom on his potential purchase. When they walked in, what they saw was possibility.

"I knew [it was the right place] the moment I saw Jenn's and Robert's faces," Dispenza says. "There was an intrigue and a curiosity that hit both of them at the same time." The duo



A RETRO FIT What was once the IBM building, first constructed in Midtown in the 1950s, is now home to covetable condominiums, including this eclectic and bright one by Reiner White Design Studio.







SHADES OF GRAY

From left: Striking the perfect balance between sharp and soft, the master bedroom features the same grays that echo throughout the rest of the house. The sudden yet relaxed pop of yellow adds a sense of boldness to the otherwise tonal color palette; the dining room boasts a modern and elegant design with clean lines and cool colors—not to mention that familiar canary yellow on the chairs.

struck a deal to relax one of their cardinal rules—keep friends and business separate—and signed on to design the condo's cool interiors.

“It was important to work with someone who really understood my personality and what I needed in terms of comfort, lifestyle and aesthetic. And who better than people who know you?” Dispenza posits. Despite the dynamics that can happen when mixing business and friends, this was a fantastic designer-client relationship—thanks in no small part to Dispenza's psychological background.

“In my work, there's a great deal of unknown, and you cannot be afraid of it,” he explains. “Fear-based decisions stifle, create barriers to positive outcomes.” Trusting that he'd chosen his designers wisely, Dispenza gave Reiner and White basic ideas, a budget... and his full confidence. Beyond that, he maintained a good sense of boundaries between the personal and the professional.



And, yet, “there’s still an inherent pressure to get things just right when it’s one of your best friends buying his very first place, and you’re on a tight time frame,” Reiner says. “There’s an emotional component, especially since you’re going to hear how the design is working for them six months down the road.”

“We do drink there on weekends. We hang out by the pool,” White interjects. “We intentionally put a lot of thought into the energy of Franco’s place—making sure it was bold and confident, but also ‘nerdy and sexy,’ like he requested from the beginning.”

That translated to a symphony of French gray and soft ochre, mingling with unfinished high-gloss maple, caramel-colored leather, mod light fixtures, atmospheric art pieces and loads of intricate textures to soften the space’s masculine angles.

The most prominent geometric pattern is undoubtedly that of the floors; the existing maple was painted to remedy extensive sun

damage—at the same cost of replacing the boards completely. That unorthodox design moment was a sticking point—not so much for Dispenza, but for his friends.

“I knew I wanted unique, and Jenn and Robert’s idea was one of the most amazing things I’d ever encountered... but no one could imagine why we would paint wood floors.” All said and done, the scale of the directional, David Hicks-esque pattern provides the perfect foundation for all of the residence’s other motifs. And, it turns out, it’s the component guests say they love most.

Dispenza was traveling the week before the big reveal, but White notes what a rarity it is for a client to see a project after complete installation. Seeing it all at once was truly a “wow!” moment. Sheers have been mounted to separate the sleeping quarters from the living space, establishing a boundary, but giving the filtered impression of the boudoir beyond. Meanwhile, the condo’s conversation

EXPERTLY ECLECTIC

From left: The kitchen’s open design creates an inviting and warm atmosphere; With the addition of steel and reclaimed wood bookcases that hold all of the Italian-American homeowner’s prized cookbooks, a David Hicks-esque pattern that makes the painted wood floors pop and helps complement the neutral yet still vibrant color palette, sheers and tactile textiles that help soften the masculinity of the space, this is a truly unique room for wining and dining.







SERENITY NOW From left: Soft golds, silvers and grays help bring a calming energy to the space, while midcentury-modern accents, intriguing artwork and other accoutrements make it simultaneously dynamic; the perfect room to kick back and relax, the living room is drenched in natural light courtesy of the massive and massive windows.

pieces range from metallic bear head—a gift White gave Dispenza years ago—to a gold-and-gray plaid wallcovering, to sexy pillows from Reiner White’s in-house soft goods collection, White Rhino.

Up for tenure in April, Dispenza is especially fond of having a serene space to complete work tasks—especially with stunning views of the Midtown skyline. And since his designers knew his dining table would do double duty, they commissioned a custom piece by local craftsmen at Horizon Home, delivering equal parts sturdiness and style. But don’t think for a second that Dispenza isn’t eating and entertaining at this spot too.

“I’m Italian. The thing I like best is cooking,” he confesses. When he isn’t whipping up a delectable spread of antipasti, he’s poring over one of the numerous tomes stacked on his reclaimed wood-and-steel bookcase. “There’s the full gamut of subjects, and what that says about Franco is that he’s open-minded,” explains Reiner. “It was incredible how he allowed us to take an idea—without pushback—and run with it.”

Isn’t it amazing what a little trust can do?





DESIGN DETAILS

TYPE
Condominium

LOCATION
Midtown

INTERIOR DESIGN
Reiner White Design Studio
reinerwhitedesignstudio.com

RESOURCES
Jim Reid
Custom floor painting
jimmiegreid.com

Siematic
Kitchen cabinetry
siematic.com

NOIR
Brass diamond pendant lights and
brass Taranto chandelier
noirfurniturela.com

Horizon Home
Custom dining table
horizonhomefurniture.net

Gilt
Aloft caramel dining chairs
gilt.com

Kelly O'Neal
Abstract artwork in living space
koneal.com

Gus Modern
Mercury velvet sleeper sofa
gusmodern.com

York Wallcoverings
Harris Plaid wallcovering in living
space
yorkwall.com

Bernhardt
Tufted Palazzo swivel chair
bernhardt.com

Dwell Studio
Pietro gray wing chair
dwellstudio.com

Arteriors Home
Ochre Ellie lamps
arteriorshome.com

Westside Market
Lamps and large art pieces in
bedroom
westsidemarketatll.com

Donna Karan Home
Bedding
donnakaranhome.com

White Rhino
Custom toss pillows
reinerwhitedesignstudio.com
