

Smart Condo Improvements Any Condo Owner Can Make

BY BRUCE WENTWORTH, AIA

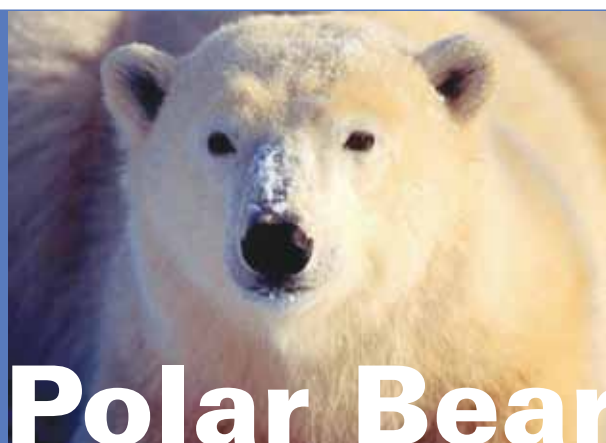
Condos are a cost-effective choice as a residence for first-time homeowners or baby-boomers looking to downsize. Unfortunately, most condos have plain, boxy interiors that lack architectural detail, custom features or aesthetic charm. The benefit to buying a plain condo is that smart design choices will enhance the home's comfort, aesthetics, functionality and market value.

Recent clients – a mother and daughter, plus their two beloved wire-haired dachshunds – proved that downsizing and upgrading a condo were a wise choice. Despite a slow real estate market, they quickly sold their Cleveland Park, Washington, D.C. home which enabled them to purchase a new condo in Alexandria, Virginia. After growing tired of shoveling snow and the increased home maintenance, mother and daughter decided it was time to try a new way of living. When they found a modern top-floor, three-bedroom, 2.5 bath condo that featured spectacular views of Washington, D.C. and was dog friendly, they knew it would be worth the investment to enhance the condo.

Although their new home was nicely appointed with modern appliances and featured a well-designed layout, it lacked architectural character – so much so that the homeowners came to refer to it as a “blank box.” Knowing that they planned to stay in the home for a long period of time, the clients approached our design/build team with a goal of developing a design that provided their “blank box” with ample storage, aesthetic charm, functionality, and plenty of personality.

Taking a ‘master plan’ approach from the start, it was agreed that a furniture plan be prepared for the entire condo to selectively use their existing furniture along with a few





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key newly purchased pieces for the living room. After agreeing upon a furniture plan our designers were able to determine the best locations for custom built-in units. This also allowed us to decide how to selectively embellish the apartment with wall and ceiling moldings, as well as lighting.

The large living/dining room lacked a focal point and did not have sufficient storage. At the dining room wall we designed a custom built-in that functions as a buffet, china storage, and display case. The built-in provides the homeowners with an appealing storage space that looks like it was always part of the space. The addition of a family painting flanked by wall sconces makes the room personal.

In order to dignify the condo's living space, the homeowner requested a custom ceiling treatment, one that would give the room architectural character. After studying the space, a suitable design with a gridded pattern was created. Applied moldings unify the dining and living areas as one large space, while a hanging light fixture, with fabric shade, demarks dining area. Subtle color variations give the ceiling treatment depth and detail. The modest, understated ceiling moldings fit the modern minimalist condominium's architecture, while the millwork provides the desired custom detail.

A hallway, varying from 48" to 54" in width, widens as it leads from the foyer to the living spaces. The boring space is embellished with a three-part ziggurat-shaped bookcase that accentuates the hallway's tapered space. A custom 36"-

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high bookcase – designed and fabricated by the our carpentry team – is comprised of three sections, each section slightly deeper as it nears the living room, providing the perfect display space for family photos and memorabilia. Panel molding, applied to the wall above the new bookcase, highlights the wall, and divides the long hall into three sections demarked with decorative sconces. A treasured print of a dachshund gives the space personality.

Throughout the condo our design team utilized a palette of three paint colors for wall color, wall panel color, and molding/trim color. And at the living/dining space the ceiling moldings were embellished with two tones of white paint in gloss and flat.

The well-appointed kitchen, designed by the condo developer, had a small, but inadequate, table space. The homeowners preferred that space be fitted out with an additional pantry and a built-in desk. What was once a dark wasted corner of the kitchen is now an attractive and functional desk area for work, computer, and storage. With their dogs on a bed tucked beneath the built-in desk, the owners can pay bills or catch up on work, all in their new customized kitchen.

The National Association of the Remodeling Industry recently awarded this project a Capital CotY Award in the Residential Interior Specialty category for its innovative use of materials and construction. With strategic, thoughtful design, well-constructed details, and a good furniture plan our clients' "blank-box condo" is now the perfect place to feel at home.

Bruce Wentworth, ALA is an architect and contractor with Wentworth, Inc. a residential remodeling design/build firm. Learn more about his firm's services at www.wentworthstudio.com or call 240-395-0705 x 100 ★

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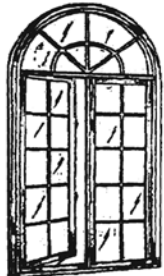
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