



Wade Weissmann Architecture connected the client of this University Club condo to a group of artisans outside Paris to help create a French Art Deco design.

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Artistic Architecture

Wade Weissmann helped combine local and Parisian creations to craft a condo that's an Art Deco dream.

BY NICOLE BELL | PHOTOS BY DAVID BADER

For these art-loving homeowners, surrounding themselves with art — in a condo that is art in itself — was truly a dream. So when an unfinished condo in the University Club Tower became available, they jumped at the chance to take what was essentially a blank slate and make that dream come true.

To achieve their vision, the pair turned to Wade Weissmann, AIA, president of Wade Weissmann Architecture, who worked with a pair of interior designers, Jessica Jubelirer and the late Jon Schlagenhaft, plus a host of both local makers and Parisian artisans.

“In this particular unit, the owners really wanted the best sort of finishes that they could get. So when you’re doing a French Art Deco inspired penthouse, where would you go to outfit it correctly but to France?” Weissmann muses. “We employed a lot of artisans from France to actually do a lot of the components that were in this unit.”

To achieve that French Art Deco look, the artisans — whom Weissmann says he’s worked with for more than 25 years — created a variety of custom light fixtures, gates, racks for the wine room and other home furnishings.

“The beauty of working with this group of artisans is that they have workshops for stone carving,” Weissmann explains. “They have workshops for woodcarving. They have workshops for ironwork and metalwork. Even bronze and gilding. So the nice thing is that you can incorporate lots of different materials and the artisans all work together synergistically, which is really unusual, and very nice to have.”

Ensuring each element was a perfect fit, artists flew to Milwaukee to field measure and fully comprehend each of the spaces in the condo before getting to work. The pieces were then shipped to the states, where their creators personally oversaw their installation.

The homeowners, devotees of both the visual and performing arts, wanted their décor to seamlessly showcase their extensive art collection, Weissmann adds.

“They wanted to have this unit be very sympathetic for a modern art collection. And so they wanted something very urbane and sophisticated to go with the art,” he explains. “[The] interior designer was very much on the same page as they were in doing something that was more classically inspired or French Art Deco-inspired for the interiors.”

To that end, the homeowners also began collecting vintage architectural finishes that fit the bill. Whatever they couldn’t find, they had created. Weissmann cites a pair of artful lanterns in the media room.



Geometric shapes were stylized to give the condo a modern Art Deco feel. "They use interesting and exotic materials in those interiors, with modern lighting and beautiful inlaid stonework," Weissmann says.



The clients, big supporters of theater, symphony, and other Milwaukee arts, wanted a space that fit a modern art collection. "They wanted something very urbane and sophisticated to go with the art," architect Wade Weissmann says. "That led them to collecting vintage fixtures and architectural components that were part of that design genre."

To continue the theme, Weissmann also called upon a Chicago area stoneworker to lay exquisite marble tile in the spa bathroom, a project that required each piece of marble to be hand cut. The effort took 16 weeks to complete.

"Everything is perfectly resolved. Every single liner, every piece of stone, how they go around corners, everything is like perfection," Weissmann says.

For a local touch, a Milwaukee area millworker created the millwork, the moldings around the doors and windows, and the doors themselves — which, Weissmann adds, were fitted with hardware from an area manufacturer as well.

Honoring Milwaukee's beloved Lake Michigan, deep blues and warm, rich tones were used throughout the home, blending a "local" hue with an international aesthetic. Weissmann also explains that some areas of the home used an intensive application of French lacquer for notable shine and a luxuriously high-end finish.

"The French Art Deco style, it obviously was a very sophisticated [look]," he adds. "Everything was wonderfully stylized back then. It was geometric shapes that were stylized to give it that sort of modern feel. But then they use really interesting and exotic materials in those interiors, with the more modern lighting and beautiful inlaid stonework. French beautiful wood veneers that were usually layered geometrically and then given a French polish on them. Those are all things that were a part of this build-out."



Opposite top: The boxed-out radiators have custom-made gorgeous metal grills for looks as well as functionality. The radiators are supported by octagonal legs, and the radiator for each room has a slightly different design and finish. As for the molding, “There was an amazing millworker in Milwaukee who did all of the millwork — all the moldings around the doors and the windows,” Weissmann says. “He actually provided the doors. We had a hardware manufacturer make all the hardware for the doors.”

Opposite bottom: The bathroom walls feature layers of lacquer carefully sanded and layered to a finish that creates a pristine, glassy surface atop a coat of French gray paint.

Above: “The materials and how they were finished were also very much a part of this project,” Weissmann says. “French beautiful wood veneers were usually layered geometrically and then given a French polish.”

A close working relationship with the clients, Weissmann adds, helped build a level of necessary trust between the homeowners and the designers to create the desired vision.

“The client is amazing. When they trust you, they trust you to deliver what they’re asking for. And so when they said they really wanted [to] build a place with a high level of finish and a lot of craftsmanship we hope that we deliver by being able to take them in a direction,” he says, adding that the homeowner speaks fluent French, affording her the ability to meet and communicate with the artisans and see the work they were creating before it was sent over and installed.

“They were in Europe and we had made accommodations for them to meet this group of artisans and said ‘If you’re interested, and you feel as if this would be of a high quality and something you’re looking to incorporate, we’d love for you to go and visit them.’ And they came back and said, ‘They’re phenomenal.’

“And they really are. They’re a treasure.” MKE