



HONORING HOTEL'S HERITAGE

CONDO REDESIGN REFLECTS 1920S STYLE

BY LILLIAN COX

Last February, interior designer Danielle Perkins was approached by the new owner of a condominium in the historical El Cortez Hotel in downtown San Diego. The homeowner had just purchased a one-bedroom, 624-square-foot condo and approached Perkins because of her expertise with small living spaces.

"The condo was empty and the client contacted me for a consultation right away," Perkins recalled.

"The space has large, stunning original windows that overlook the city and bay, but they blended in with the yellow walls and didn't allow their character to truly be seen. The interior doors and high ceilings got lost in the space and I wanted to make sure they came to the forefront of the design. The ex-



EDUARDO CONTRERAS U-T PHOTOS

The flamboyance of the Roaring '20s defines this chic one-bedroom condo in the El Cortez Hotel, which originally opened on Thanksgiving Day 1927. The tall bookcases accentuate the high ceilings in the living area. In the bedroom (left), a Park Avenue writing table was placed in front of an original glass window for a spectacular view while working.



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Danielle Perkins tended to each detail for the 1920s style, including (from left) a lyre-back chair; art deco wallpaper in the entry; and a gold pedestal bistro table for dining, framed by colorful curtains for a touch of glam.

isting dark floors set a great base to layer the design elements of top of it.

“We put our heads together and began designing.”

The homebuyer, who wished not to be identified, was drawn to the historical significance of the building as well as the community atmosphere of Cortez Hill and its close proximity to Balboa Park.

El Cortez opened on Thanksgiving Day 1927 with 85 apartment suites and 32 hotel rooms. For the next 40 years, it was the destination for bridge tournaments, concerts and soirees. In 1956, it became the world’s first building with an exterior glass elevator. Eventually, the building fell into disrepair and, after sitting empty for more than 20 years, the J Peter Block Companies bought and renovated it in 1997. It now has 85 condominium units, commercial and office space and the Don Room, which serves as a venue for weddings and social gatherings.

In designing the décor, the homeowner wanted to be true to the 1927 heritage of the hotel. Perkins began by creating a black-and-white foundation accented by glorious pops of color to bring a contemporary feel that is associated with the 1920s era.

“All the interior doors and trim around the windows were painted black to contrast the bright white walls, which produced a stunning outcome that perfectly frames the city view,” Perkins said. “I used simple clean lines and a touch of

1920s glam.”

Black-and-white art deco wallpaper creates an accent wall in the entry, which includes an antique swan table. Four helix 96-inch acacia bookcases from CB2, a division of Crate & Barrel, were purchased to accommodate a large book collection and showcase personal mementos in the living area.

“The tall bookcases provided a great solution and created a focal point for the room while utilizing vertical space to keep the room open,” Perkins said. “They bring the eye upward and allow the height of the ceilings to shine.”

A green sofa, a chair bursting with the colors of spring and jewel-toned curtains in gold, aqua and dark fuchsia create a lively look. Perkins created an illusion of space by selecting furniture with legs to keep them off the floor, thus giving a light feel to the room.

“We also used a small bistro table with a thin gold pedestal and ghost chairs in the dining area for visual space,” she said. “A glass top was placed on the entry table to mimic this same idea.”

Perkins’ shopping expeditions yielded one-of-a-kind discoveries such as a vintage brass floor lamp from Rare Bird Consignment House in San Diego and a swan entry table from Consignment Classics. She found a vintage brass tray folding coffee table with a natural patina that she said “brings old charm to the room” at Loveseat, a vintage shop in

Kearny Mesa.

“Lyre back chairs were something special that my client had been on the hunt for, but she was unable to find the perfect ones,” Perkins said. “While we were in a vintage store on our purchasing

day, she mentioned this to me and within minutes we found two of them in great condition. It was meant to be. We purchased them and left the store ecstatic. Such a fun experience!”

A Park Avenue writing table was placed in front of an original glass window in the bedroom for a spectacular view while working. Other period-style pieces in the room include a Carrero three-drawer mirrored end table and Safavieh green rug.

The design process from conception to finishing touches took four months.

“Allowing this space to come to life was a team effort,” Perkins said. “I was there to coach my client through the process using my design expertise while incorporating the client’s ideas and possessions. An interior design project can be an overwhelming task, but my role was to assist my client through the process to achieve the colorful cozy home that was envisioned.”

Lillian Cox is an Encinitas-based writer who has been covering North County for the Union-Tribune since 2002.

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