

MODERN LUXURY

CS

NEIL PATRICK HARRIS

THE CONSUMMATE
ENTERTAINER

CREATIVE CLASS

The People &
Places Shaping
Chicago's Art Scene

PALM BEACH GLOW

Resort Ready Jewelry
With Retro Appeal



Plus

Stellar Sushi in
River North. A
New MCA Curator
& The Season's
Sparkling Parties

one to watch



Clockwise from left: Dan Rak's first full-scale design project was his own Wicker Park home, a complete gut rehab that included a brand-new custom kitchen; his Wicker Park dining room features a timeless graphic wallpaper balanced with masculine and feminine elements; Rak's River West studio is home base for a team of five working on a variety of residential projects.



WINNING NUMBER

Leaving the corporate world behind, a one-time tax attorney starts flipping homes and ends up discovering his passion for design along the way.

By Tate Gunnerson

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ven as young as 8 years old, Dan Rak's favorite activity was touring model homes with his folks. Perhaps it's not all that surprising that Rak, who grew up to be a tax attorney, wound up flipping houses himself—a lucrative

side gig that morphed into his eponymous full-service design firm, Dan Rak Design (danrakdesign.com), within a few short years. "I was practicing tax law for five years, and I was good at it, but I didn't feel fulfilled," Rak says. "Now I love what I do."

To Rak, there's nothing like the buzz you get from helping somebody create a home that hits all their hot buttons. His first condo renovations were in hip neighborhoods like Roscoe Village and Wicker Park, incorporating high-end cabinetry, custom bathrooms and solid core doors that totally transformed the formerly dated units. "Flipping has a bad reputation, and I wanted to have a good product that I could stand behind," he explains. "There's a market for quality." One job led to another, and Rak soon added interior design services into the mix. He describes his look as polished industrialism. Think contemporary, clean-lined furnishings covered in sumptuous fabrics, like velvet and mohair, with

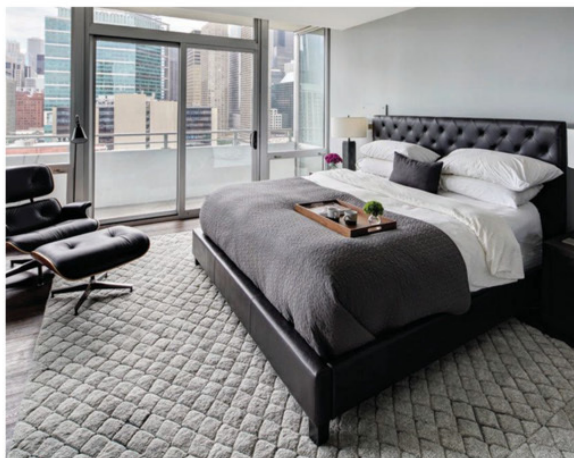


KITCHEN, DINING ROOM PHOTOS BY CYNTHIA LYNN; PORTRAIT BY JENNI GAUDREAU

graphic wallcoverings, plush rugs, and wood and metal accents adding layers of interest. "My work is trim and tailored, but I'm also cognizant of the fact that it has to be comfortable and livable," Rak explains. "I want people to want to linger and hang out in my spaces." But while he understands that creativity is the most crucial component to his success, he approaches billing and project management with an intensity that he developed during his time as a tax attorney. "I don't think there's a designer in Chicago that gives a more detailed invoice than I do, out to the penny, but I've found that clients value that," he explains. Indeed, he's up to his neck with design projects, including a game-changing renovation of four entire floors in a graystone in the Gold Coast. The industrious designer is also developing a line including furnishings and lighting designed specifically for smaller urban spaces—the kind of pieces he often needs and can't find. It's safe to say that he's found the fulfillment he was always seeking from his career. "If I won the lottery, I'd keep doing exactly what I'm doing," Rak confesses. "I love the work that much." ■



Clockwise from left: Rak completely gutted a high-rise condo that was "like a '90s Vegas hotel suite," he says. He reconfigured the layout and installed a new custom kitchen; the open-concept space makes the most of the city views. The dining table is from RH, and the chairs are from DWR; in the master bedroom, Rak paired his client's existing bed with an Eames lounge chair from DWR and a rug from Oscar Isberian.



PHOTOS BY ERIC HAUSHMAN