



The home's palette begins in the kitchen, where a **Kohler** sink and both pull-down and food-prep faucets from **Rohl**, catch the light of ample pendants and beautifully complement the sand-colored quartzite.

SOPHISTICATED PALETTE

TRANSFORMING A HOME WITH A COLOR
STORY THAT IS RESTRAINED AND REFINED



TEXT **PAUL HAGEN**
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It is hard to imagine connecting with a designer more directly than meeting him as his work is being unveiled at a friend's housewarming party. "We had a pleasant conversation, and they liked what we did," remembers designer Dan Rak. "Our clients loved the architecture of their house but knew that the finishes were dated and that it required a good deal of work before it would be right for them. They asked what we would do with the house: where we would spend, where we thought we could salvage elements," he explains. "Once we explained our thinking, they got on board and trusted us completely."

"Context is incredibly important in my work," Rak explains. "My starting point is always the geography and the architecture." And although this particular property is a single-family home among high-rises, Rak thinks it's still a good architectural fit for Chicago's culture-rich River North neighborhood. But he felt the interiors would need a degree of formality to feel consistent with the area's other high-end residences. "We set out to create a space that was impressive, urban, sophisticated," Rak explains, "but also a comfortable space for the family to live."

Rak began in the kitchen with a sandy quartzite stone—against which elements such as Rohl faucets and a Kohler sink would present a stately shine. Thereafter, a central part of Rak's task was to carry the energy of these refined colors throughout the home, while also experimenting with the balance of light and dark in each space. "We knew that we needed to exercise restraint in the selections in order to achieve the tailored, sophisticated feel that the architecture required," Rak explains.

The home's sophisticated palette ultimate-

ly came to incorporate refined blues and chocolate browns, providing thoughtful contrast to creamier tones throughout. “I’m really big on a sense of cohesion when it comes to a house,” says Rak. “I’m not a fan of moments where it feels like you’ve gone through the looking glass.” So, for example, one will not find a wild contrast between the kitchen dining area and the more formal dining room. “The distinction is subtle,” Rak points out. “We allowed the color in the breakfast room to be a bit more saturated than the color in the dining room.” The latter seems set up to function flawlessly, uncluttered by much more than table, chairs, and a banquette—but offers richness via a patterned wallcovering and painted recessed ceiling.

The living room is similarly stately. Crisp white

shades crown substantial table lamps, which stand sentinel above a sofa and chairs in beige, brown, and blue. “The armchair that sits in the living room, with its back to the foyer, is an absolute favorite,” say Rak. “We didn’t want the overall feel of the house to feel stodgy or traditional. Including this contemporary piece helped set the tone from the start.”

Meanwhile, there were ghosts of design past to be banished in the primary bath. “When we started, there was a large glass-block window at the center of the room where the vanity is now,” remembers Rak. “It felt anything but luxurious.” So, the team separated the windows to create space for the client’s makeup table, and used materials with depth and texture to emphasize a sense of luxury—including luxe Rohl fixtures in



Balancing the formality of this dining room with less formal areas took editing to ensure subtle contrasts, according to Rak.



“While the architecture and interiors are formal,” says Rak, “it’s not your grandmother’s house.”

the vanity and shower. Creamy beiges and rich browns continue in the primary bedroom, which features one of the home’s most prominent pieces of art above a small sitting area opposite the bed. “The client came with their art collection,” Rak explains. However, he notes, “for a house of this size, there were relatively few open walls where art could be incorporated.”

In contrast, the secondary bath was designated for the clients’ son. “We wanted it to be a bit more relaxed and kid-friendly,” says Rak. So where the designer opted for marble and natural stone in the primary bath, this bath uses more forgiving materials such as ceramic tile and quartz—not to mention durable Kohler for the sink and tub.

However, it is in the powder room where Rak had, in his words, “a lot of fun.” He liked

that the wallpaper still felt formal but loved the squirrels hidden throughout the design, a perfect touch for the animal-loving homeowners. “We tried to include some elements that showed that we—and our clients—don’t take ourselves too seriously,” says Rak. The room also features sconces from Hudson Valley, a Rohl faucet, and undermount Kohler sink.

Another space where the walls offer an air of drama is the office. Picture frame moldings make their deep color feel even more dignified. Plus, with careful planning, Rak was able to make space for both a substantial desk and a meeting area with a table with multiple chairs. “Fortunately, the raised ceilings helped the room to feel larger,” says Rak, “and allowed us to use more furniture than we might have been able to use with a lower ceiling.”

So what are the takeaways from Rak’s

transformation? “To me everything comes down to a strong edit and excellent tailoring,” he reveals. “You can pull together a collection of individually beautiful items, but if they don’t complement each other or aren’t the right scale, something will feel off. Accepting that something just doesn’t work, no matter how much you love it, is required for a successful outcome,” he explains.

But whether considering color, carpeting or couches, how does one know if something is working? “I’m big on trusting my instincts,” says Rak. “Sometimes it’s difficult to articulate why I think something will or won’t work.” But establishing a good relationship with homeowners helps them

understand when it’s time to go with Rak’s gut. “Good clients are great about trusting that feeling, and they get the best results.”

Rak says he is “so happy” with the finished results of the overall project and that the outcome very much resonates with his personal aesthetic. “It’s sharp, sophisticated and entirely tailored— with a bit of levity sprinkled throughout the house to ensure we’re not taking ourselves too seriously,” he explains. “The client is thrilled with the results. It’s a space that feels reflective of themselves, and I think they’re proud to call it home.”

See more of this designer’s work by visiting online at danrakdesign.com. ■



The primary bath’s luxe shower package is by **Rohl**.



Rohl also provided the vanity fixtures and tub filler.



Powder room sconces by **Hudson Valley**, sink by **Kohler**, and faucet by **Rohl**.



Relaxing shades of beige, brown, and gray create calm in the bedroom.

"We started with the layout," says Rak of the office, "then needed to source pieces that could fit within the floor plan."

IT'S **SHARP, SOPHISTICATED,**
AND **ENTIRELY TAILORED.**