



# PROTEAN TOOLS

*It wasn't enough for Alisa Bloom to transform her 1920s Chicago penthouse into a sophisticated ringer for the Parisian apartments she adores. Along the way, she morphed herself into one of the city's most successful general contractors—with her own luxurious pad as her best calling card.*

The living room of Alisa Bloom's Chicago apartment, which she renovated with the help of architect Richard Bories and designer James Shearron. The midcentury Paolo Buffa chairs are re-covered in a Schumacher velvet, the Jacques Garcia stool is from Baker, and the circa-1960s lamp (left) is Italian. An Andre Miripolsky painting rests on the 18th-century French mantel. **OPPOSITE:** Bloom, a designer and general contractor, in her office. The desk is custom, the tall table lamp (right) is by RH, Restoration Hardware, the curtains are of a Romo fabric, and the ceiling is covered in a Schumacher wallpaper.



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The living room's custom sofa is in a Kravet fabric with pillows in a Jim Thompson silk, the 1970s chairs are from Revival, and the vintage cocktail table is from Martin La Brocante. The console is by Crate & Barrel, the vintage chandelier is by Hans-Agne Jakobsson, the curtains are of an Oscar de la Renta fabric for Lee Jofa, and the walls are in Benjamin Moore's Cement Gray. **OPPOSITE:** In the kitchen, the Molteni range, Wilmette cabinet hardware, and Kallista sink fittings are all custom. The 1970s stools are from Haute Antiques 207 and the ceiling lights are by Circa Lighting.



**A**lisa Bloom isn't your typical decorator. She has always been a chameleon. In the early aughts, when most of Chicago's fashionable set were buying loft warehouse conversions with exposed pipes in the West Loop downtown (as the editor in chief and publisher of *Chicago* magazine, I've observed the city's real estate trends from an insider's perch), Bloom did the exact opposite, moving into a 1920s gem on the city's storied Gold Coast.

After a stint as a vintage jewelry collector and seller (she is legendary around town for snatching a 17-carat yellow diamond ring at auction in the middle of an especially frigid winter, a feat she managed while clad in moon boots and a parka), she made a complete career switch and recast herself as a general contractor, albeit a particularly glamorous one. With her own 17th-floor apartment as her calling card, she threw herself into the work—finding contractors, sourcing finishes, negotiating jobs. Before long, she was buying, renovating, and flipping properties—overhauling 11 units out of 47 in her own Gothic building alone.

She was in Morocco when her doorman called to tell her a penthouse in her building was about to go on the market. "I ran home to get it, but a neighbor—an owner of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers—bought it out from under me," she says. A few months later, however, she bumped into him in the elevator, and he told her he had taken on too much.







The bed in the guest room has a headboard covered in a vintage French fabric, and a pillow and coverlet in a Lee Jofa silk. **LEFT, FROM TOP:** The den's vintage Edward Wormley sofa is in a Scalamanré velvet, and the rug is by the Rug Company. The guest bath has a Waterworks sink, Lefroy Brooks fittings, and RH, Restoration Hardware sconces; the walls are painted in Farrow & Ball's Teresa's Green.



In the master bedroom, the B&B Italia bed is in a Holland & Sherry wool, the desk is by Lucien Rollin, and the chair is by Oscar de la Renta for Century. The 1940s console was purchased in Paris, the walls are sheathed in a Holland & Sherry fabric, and the unsigned artwork is from Redefined Chicago. For details, see Resources.



"He was overwhelmed and said, 'I know you like to renovate apartments. Do you want it? I said, 'Yup.'"

She would often make extended trips to Europe to shop for vintage finds for her clients, spending weeks at a time renting an 18th-century apartment in Paris's Marais district. She envisioned re-creating the atmosphere of a French interior in her Chicago penthouse. The first thing she did was to open up the 1970s dropped ceilings. She was startled to find an extra three feet of space hidden overhead. "What a gold mine that was," she says. Given the scale of the project, she decided against going it alone and enlisted the services of Bories & Shearron, a New York architecture-and-design firm. "She wanted to do things differently and have fun," says James Shearron, an interior designer who introduced Bloom to Miles Redd, an *ED A-List* decorator, whose color-punched style she had long admired, and who soon became a friend. Redd served as an informal sounding board for her apartment overhaul. "She is a marvel at getting things done in exactly the way she has imagined, and her imagination is pretty incredible," Redd says. "She does her research, finds amazing craftsmen, and realizes her dreams—which is harder than it looks."

Shearron and his partner, architect Richard Bories, lined the walls of Bloom's cavernous living room with floor-to-ceiling French paneling painted in a soft gray hue with a hint of periwinkle. "As the sun goes down," Bloom says, "the space glows purple." *continued on page 178*