



## Moving Up

**Designer recounts interior remodeling of 1960s-era Bratenahl Place suite**

By John Koncar | Photos courtesy of John Florian Koncar Interiors

*John Florian Koncar Interiors*

In 1967 rental suites and condominium apartments at Bratenahl Place became available. In promotional materials, the residential property located along Lake Erie’s shores was claimed to be “Cleveland’s Most Distinguished Address.” Reading original promotional brochures is like looking at scenes from *Mad Men*, the cable TV series about Madison Avenue advertising executives, touting a lifestyle of privacy and glamour. Recent availability of these spacious units has generated new interest in living the “high life” above the forested shoreline, a mere ten minutes from downtown Cleveland and about the same distance from University Circle.

Originally built on what were The Country Club grounds by the Bratenahl Development Corporation headed by John B. Dempsey II, the property is defined by two 15-story residential towers designed by New York Architect Nicholas Satterlee, whose wife Sally Hitchcock grew up in Bratenahl. Original interior design was executed by the New York firm of Theo. Hofstatter Company. Julian Abbott was in charge of decoration in both towers. He was a native Clevelander and formerly with the Rorimer, Brooks Company, an historic name in Cleveland interior decoration.

All of the apartments in both of the buildings have large balconies providing private outdoor space during the

warmer months. The two buildings share a gatehouse, Olympic-size swimming pool, tennis courts and a cliff-side fire pit on the 18 manicured and gated acres of private land. Such space and amenities are drawing a new type of resident to Bratenahl Village. These owners view the apartments as “buildable lots” on increasingly rare lakefront property. Unafraid of gutting the space, they are creating an entirely new home within the existing concrete structure. Some have bought adjacent apartments, combining them to create larger homes of 3,000 square feet or more, tailored to the owners’ functional and aesthetic preferences.

Recently, I was asked to redesign the original 1960s plan of one of the rare executive suites occupying the

14th floor in Two Bratenahl Place. The new owners of the 3,400-square-foot apartment envisioned an open plan, maximizing breathtaking views of Lake Erie, the eastern shoreline and downtown Cleveland. They required an efficient kitchen and office, a utility and laundry room, formal and informal sitting areas with audio video, a gracious master suite and guest rooms. The oversize balcony was to be fully utilized by the owners who spend their summers in Cleveland. Because this was not their primary residence, I acted not only as interior designer, but as owner’s representative, hiring the general contractor and coordinating the efforts of the lighting designers, architect and engineer and furniture procurement.

*Isn't it time we met?*



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Badly proportioned rooms and a dated material palette required a total demolition of the space.

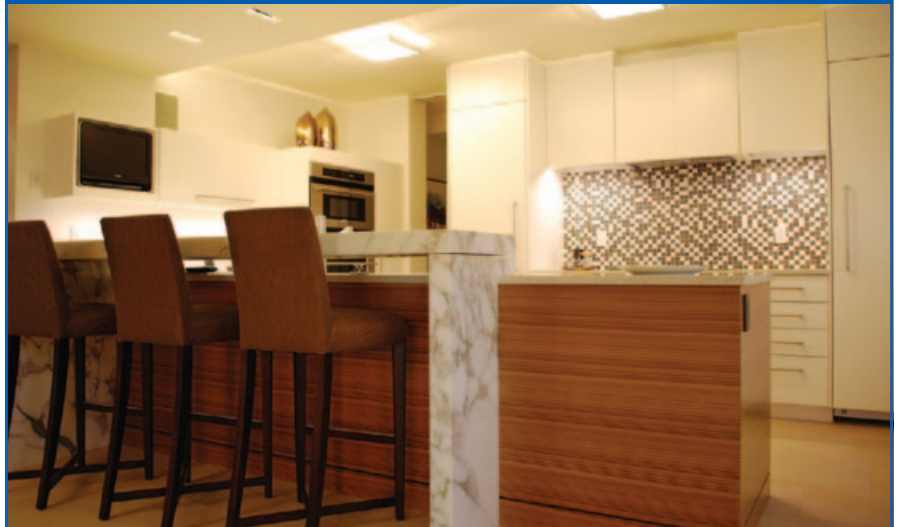
The new floor plan surrenders the original kitchen to a larger laundry and utility area, a walk-in pantry with a stacked wine cooler and an efficient home office with two workstations, custom built like the rest of the mill-work by Artistic Finishes of Willoughby. The new office space can be hidden by a sliding frosted glass door that disappears into a large storage cabinet housing the audio-video equipment. The kitchen, relocated to the former dining room, is open to the larger living space at the North West corner. From here, meals are conveniently served at either a small breakfast table near the prep area or at the round antique dining table positioned between a double sided, wood burning fireplace (exclusive to the Executive Suites) and the living room, furnished to accommodate guests.

On the other side of the fireplace, there once stood a dark and unlit library that opened to an expansive balcony occupying nearly 500 square feet. And on this balcony was a ten-person hot tub, complete with diagonal rough sawn siding on the ceiling and Spanish tiles on the floor. These were all removed and replaced with new tiled floors and a fresh coat of stucco matching the building's exterior finishes.

Once demolished, the library became a light-filled video lounge with a flat-screen TV recessed on the fireplace wall. The balcony, divided by custom bronze powder-coated planters serves as three outdoor living zones: dining, lounging and another for private rest, accessed through a master bedroom door.

Of the three bedrooms arranged along the Eastern wing, the largest of these spaces is the owners' corner suite. The original walk-in closet and bathroom were adjacent to the balcony, making it possible to install a window taking advantage of the light and lake views. A wall of custom built-in cabinetry conceals this bathroom, surprising visitors who open a cabinet door to discover the spa-like atmosphere of the newly created bathroom.

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The other two bedrooms and two bathrooms were remodeled and renovated, but occupy the same space as before. But all of the finishes and fixtures are upgraded.

The surrounding shoreline's natural beauty served as my inspiration for the

material palette. There, I found sandy beaches, blue skies and water; ice formations in the winter. To warm the space, I used a teak engineered paneling product by Treefrog as the singular wood finish used architecturally on walls and custom millwork, to capture the feeling of being

**DOWN TO DETAILS** The apartment's demanding design relied on the work of Doug Kertesz, of DAK Construction Management, Inc., who coordinated the project on a tight schedule.

on a yacht. Mechanically "laid up", the grain pattern is very consistent so little wood is wasted during fabrication.

Techno-quartz covers all of the floors in the living areas and the balcony. It looks like sandstone, referencing the beaches below and also faces some of the fireplace elevations. It is frost-proof and easy to maintain. The bedroom wing is carpeted in wool installed by Watson Carpet.

The apartment benefits from significant new technology in lighting and controls. Units in Bratenahl Place are built slab to concrete slab. There is no plenum through which a contractor can run wiring. I designed sleek soffits accommodating wiring and lighting, while also adding architectural detail.

Having interest in using LED lighting, the owners engaged Beverly Hills



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**TWO WITH A VIEW** Bratenahl Place consists of two residential towers located along the shores of Lake Erie, just a few miles from downtown Cleveland.

lighting designer Sean O'Connor, of Sean O'Connor Associates, to arrange and specify fixtures and switching throughout. Now, banks of barely visible light fixtures bathe the walls in a soft energy-efficient glow. Since all are low voltage, countless transformers are concealed in the closet walls to minimize noise.

Energy efficiency guided all decisions related to appliance selection and audio-video equipment. The building replaced HVAC convectors at the time of construction, part of the owners' association's plan to cut energy costs for all units in the building. Additionally, the owners replaced all fenestration with gas-filled, double-glazed Traco windows and doors supplied and installed by Jamieson Ricca.

The furnishings reflect contemporary styling and colors are limited to light neutrals reflecting the luminous light 14 floors above the lake. Sunlight is controlled by Lutron shading systems by Clover Electric. The same vendor provided all of the switching devices and lighting controls. With this system, the owners can engage all light sources upon entering or leaving the suite, and further can create pre-set customized "scenes" that adjust the lighting from dim to bright depending on the use of the space. Handheld remote controls add further convenience to this feature.

Demolition and construction took nine months as work must be performed from 9 am until 4 pm, shortening the

## Still Hip

### Designer shares interior styles for "55 and better"

Is it time for a fresh start? Is your "55 and better" client downsizing, wanting to eliminate clutter, and ready to hand down the furniture? What is important to this market, to this client? As interior designers, it is our task to ask the questions and guide their needs and styles.

This is not an assisted living time, yet there are geriatric factors to remember in this application. In most cases, depth perception is the first factor to weaken in eyesight. Lighting becomes essential; it must be adequate in task areas and reading spaces. Strong contrast in permanent finishes would be too busy and confusing to the eye. And safety should always be a priority. Handrails in bath and shower areas are appreciated by all ages. In specifying flooring, be sure to consider how hard that surface might be on the legs for long periods of time. For example, in a kitchen we would recommend a hardwood or a soft tile such as limestone, versus porcelain tile of high density. The flooring market today has many beautiful tiles that have just enough texture to prevent slipping.

Fifty-five and better individuals have seen many interior styles in their lifetime, yet the priority now is comfort and function. Cushions that are too soft or a seat height that is too low are not practical. Nothing's worse than having a "good tired" from an active day of exercise and not having the proper support in the furniture. Contemporary and transitional styles create a clean and sleek space, which becomes an important factor for downsizing. Multipurpose living areas are often requested for special events and accommodating guests. Flex rooms become important; for example, having a library/study that can allow for a small sofa bed. Furniture pieces that offer flexibility have become quite popular, such as a sofa table that opens up for a project table or as serving station. An existing game table can be used for dining when guest arrive. There is also a chair and a half that pulls out to a twin size bed.

Color schemes are inspired by the client, but stick with the classics and add a little surprise. Find an artifact collected from a trip or artwork by their favorite artist and let those palettes guide the color direction. Colors should flow together through the interior space, which achieves continuity and calmness.

Whether it is a contract or residential project, this generation of 55 and better is a large part of our population. They have worked hard, built careers and raised their families. Downsizing should be a rejuvenating time – a fresh start that is well deserved. **P**

*Based in Chagrin Falls, Linda Chittock Studio offers interior design services for high-end residential and commercial spaces, specializing in active senior living, clubhouses and corporate offices. For more information, visit [www.lindachittockstudio.com](http://www.lindachittockstudio.com).*



typical workday. The 14th floor location made debris removal by chute impractical, so debris was removed using small carts and the freight elevator. The general contractor, DAK Construction, cleaned common areas each day leaving them spotless; managing the job with such regard to the neighbors that several

have hired them to perform similar work in the building.

Work of this scope continues in both Bratenahl One and Two with many such projects either completed or underway. It's a new decade, but Bratenahl Place continues to strive to be "Cleveland's Most Distinguished Address." **P**