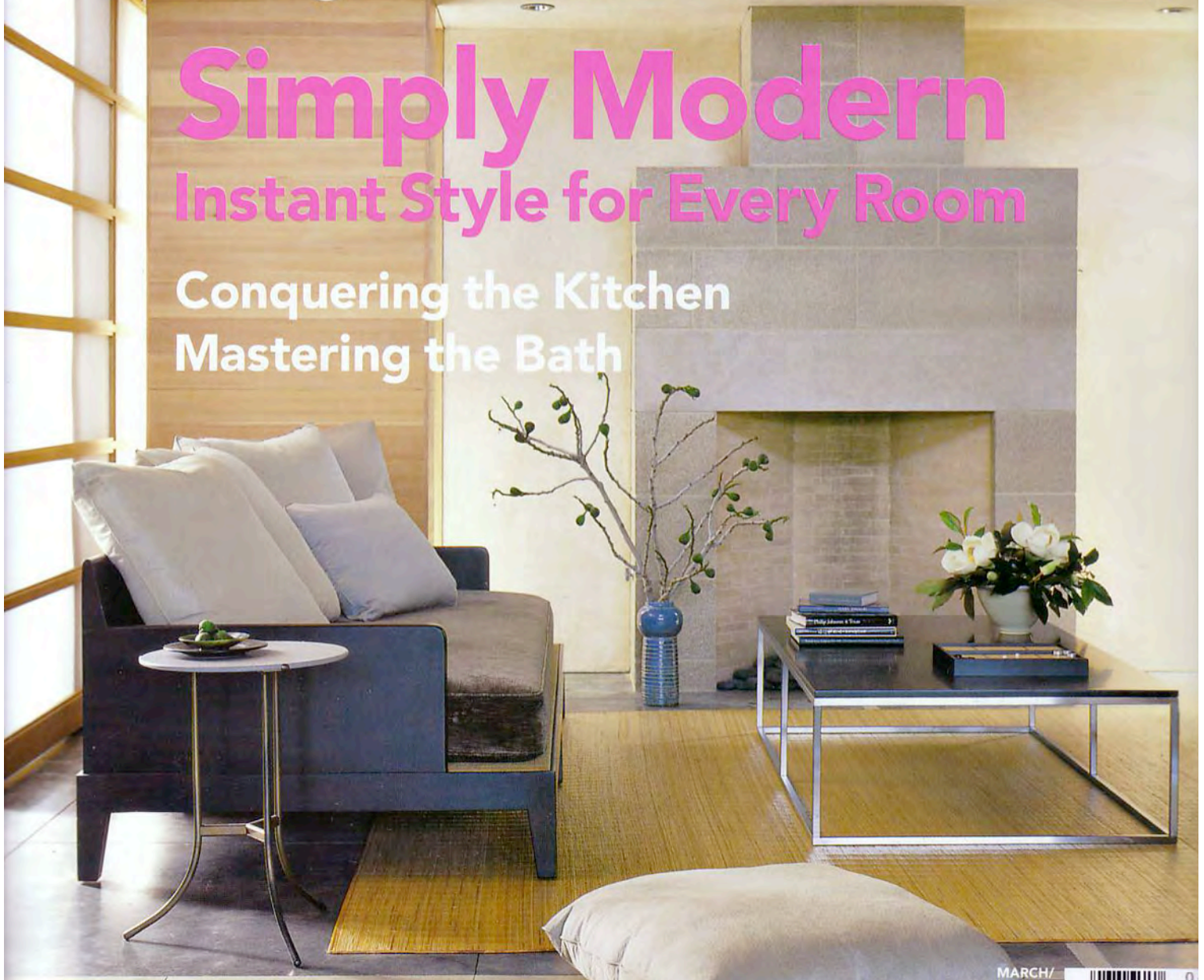


# Metropolitan Home

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Although Patrizio Fradiani restored choice historic details, like the living room fireplace, he turned the dingy Victorian into a bright, modern home filled with minimalist furniture. All the rooms mix old and new, rough and sleek. Opposite: An Italian lamp (designed by Bruno Munari, in 1966), a zebra-wood stool and mixed-media art by David de Castro.





# IN THE ITALIAN MANNER

Architect **Patrizio Fradiani** put a Milanese modern spin on his old Chicago house, transforming a dark and dowdy Victorian into a sleek and bright new home.



**T**he Italians have a healthy attitude toward history and modernity. Whether lounging on the sleekest of sofas in storied salons or scooting around a Renaissance piazza on the latest-model Vespa, Italians effortlessly embrace their rich past without fear of the future. Rome-born architect Patrizio Fradiani summoned that innate sensitivity when he renovated the 1883 Victorian he bought in Chicago's Ravenswood neighborhood with his partner of ten years, a psychotherapist.

Fradiani, who admits he's "totally into modern architecture," and his partner initially looked for a loft in an old factory but gave up after realizing they couldn't find such a space in a neighborhood they'd feel comfortable calling home. The couple discovered their historic dream house while biking through Ravenswood and fell in love with its big windows, tall ceilings, elegant wooden staircase and great light.

As for the renovation, Fradiani wanted to "blend a modernist language with the historic feel of the house. As an Italian—and an architect—I completely respect old buildings, but I think we should live in the present," he says.

The renovation was a complete gut job: Fradiani salvaged only the wooden staircase, moldings and the original wood-frame windows along the street facade. Out went plaster ceilings, vinyl and oak floors laid atop the original wide pine planks, and even the wiring and ventilation systems. In came new windows, doors and light oak floors that echo the original pine boards.

PRODUCED BY ELANA FRANKEL AND LISA SKOLNIK. PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEFF McNAMARA. WRITTEN BY RAUL BARRENECHE.





**T**he Victorian came with charming old-fashioned detailing and good bones, but it wasn't a perfect fit with the couple's busy modern life. So Fradiani freely reconfigured the floor plan of the stripped interior to take advantage of the home's best features and tailor it to his and his partner's needs. "We didn't want to make the house modern just by adding some contemporary furniture. We wanted to create modern architectural elements and a modern sense of space," says the architect-owner.

Fradiani altered the ground floor's original double-parlor plan, which was arranged with a sitting area adjoining the living room at the front of the house and a dining room off to the side. He flip-flopped the second parlor and the original dining room, which he turned into a library. Sealing a doorway that originally linked the kitchen and dining room made the

library cozier; moving the dining room made daytime meals a brighter affair, given the room's tall and slender south-facing windows. Widening an existing doorway to the kitchen at the rear of the house opened up the front-to-back flow through the house and brightened the entire first floor.

Fradiani didn't enlarge the footprint of the 3,300-square-foot house, but he did add usable space with a new raised porch off the renovated kitchen and a gravel-paved outdoor dining area overlooking the shady fenced-in backyard. The home's original garage was rotting and leaking, so Fradiani razed it and put up a new steel-framed, two-car garage clad with interior doors salvaged from the renovation. The old doors lend the structure a weathered feeling that belies its newness. The landscape, he says, is a work still in progress.



The home's former parlor is now a dining room made brighter with two new doors. The tiny canvases are part of the owners' collection of work by young artists. Opposite (right): Fradiani enjoys his morning paper alfresco, at a granite-topped table with a tree trunk for a base. He restored the landmark home's street facade (opposite, left) to its original condition.





The owners, both avid cooks, ripped out the back wall of the house, replacing it with a commercial window-wall system overlooking the yard and a new garage. Opposite: The kitchen now features lacquered doors that conceal a fridge, storage, microwave and even a powder room, all recessed into a wall. The stainless-steel island and exhaust are by Poliform.







**F**radiani made major alterations to the existing kitchen, which he found dark and chopped up into too many smaller spaces. He took out a dining nook—a tiny, windowless room that he discovered had once been a one-room schoolhouse run by the home's original owner—and the entire back wall of the building to create a single open, airy space. He replaced the rear facade with light and a view of the new garage and garden, thanks to a floor-to-gabled-ceiling commercial-grade curtain wall like those used on storefronts.

Doors of cool, translucent sandblasted glass enclose a pantry of simple wire shelving along one of the interior walls; on the opposite wall, custom cabinets made of MDF painted with high-gloss white lacquer conceal major appliances, including the refrigerator, oven and microwave. Even the door to the powder room is set flush into this wall of shiny white planes in a green "frame." Fradiani cooks—breakfast, lunch and dinner daily—on the stove built into a stainless-steel island. "I'm Italian, so cooking relaxes me," explains the creative culinary artist.

Fradiani's choice of art throughout the house gives his decor a very personal touch—indeed because many of the pieces are his own. But even the selections by other artists—most of them young and local—reflect the couple's shared passion for art.

"We've been collecting together since we met, ten years ago," explains Fradiani. "But we saw this house as a joint project, not just doing the house together but furnishing the place and picking all the art."





The upstairs guest room reveals the owners' love of mixing sleek modern furnishings with warm, ethnic pieces. The rolled-up bamboo headboard is a section of Japanese fencing. The art is by Fradiani. Opposite: The upstairs bath is a semiprivate suite of conjoined mirror-image bathrooms, each with a shower, sink and toilet, which can be partitioned off into separate quarters or left open as one big spa.



**F**radiani's changes to the original layout of the upstairs were even more drastic than what he did downstairs: Where there had been five tiny bedrooms there are now just two, with a small open study and a roomy double bathroom. And the front bedroom now spans the entire width of the house. The change was Fradiani's way of injecting a more open, loftlike sense of space to the once cramped, carved-up second floor.

Without guests around, the owners tend to leave open the custom Italian walnut doors to maximize the loft effect. The bath suite, a bright, sunny space of soothingly cool tiles, can be partitioned into two independent bathrooms (each with a toilet, shower and sink) or left open as a single large spa.

The guest room (above), luminous and whitewashed with a few bold furnishings, captures Fradiani's style. "My aesthetic

tends toward minimalism, but I'm not a pure minimalist," admits the architect. "I love Italian furniture and classic American modernism, but I also like mixing in ethnic pieces." To wit, the guest room features a thick bamboo headboard—a section of a rustic Japanese fence—along with African and Asian pieces from the couple's collection. Not to be left out of the picture, so to speak, Fradiani hung a series of his own paintings of classical architecture in the room.

The now-content architect offers sound advice for anyone faced with making his or her house into a home. "I truly believe that less is more," he says. "If you start there you can always add things later, but if you start with lots of stuff it doesn't get you anywhere." ❖

*See Resources, last pages.*



