Sister Act: North Shore Interior Designer, Jodi Morton, Transforms Her Sister's Glencoe Mid-century Home into an Eminently Stylish, Soothing Retreat

by TATE GUNNERSON January 7, 2021

A pair of console tables from Croft House flank the custom limestone fireplace mantel that interior designer, Jodi Morton, designed for the living room. The sconces are from Urban Electric. Photo by Dustin Halleck.

It seemed like fate when Mark and Wendy La Varre first toured the single-story mid-century house on a lush lot in Glencoe. Designed by architect, Samuel Abraham Marx, and built in 1953, the light-filled main living areas boasted floor-to-ceiling windows and a breezy layout that wowed the soon-to-be empty nesters. To say nothing of its location steps from the lake – so close they can often hear the waves.

Despite the home's many charms, the couple held no illusions about the work it would take to bring the dated dwelling into the modern era. The kitchen was smallish and cut off from the main living area, for example, and the finishes were well past their prime. Seduced by the possibilities, however, they hired Wendy's sister, interior designer, Jodi Morton, to rethink the space.

"I would not have bought this house if Jody wasn't going to help me do it," she says. "We are so on the same page with style, and I knew she would bring my vision to fruition painlessly."

In a complete gut renovation, Morton redesigned the layout, flipping the dining room and kitchen and creating a new butler's pantry. By strategically moving walls, she also ballooned the size of the once tiny third bedroom. And, inspired by a dream, she made an executive decision to paint the window frames black.

In the master bedroom, an iconic Eames lounge chair offers a spot to relax and enjoy the lush outdoor surroundings. The blackout draperies are from Romo. Photo by Dustin Halleck.

"It adds a lot of dimension and warmth," she explains. "I wanted this house to be serene and peaceful, like you're on vacation."

That's certainly the situation in the front den, its gray walls creating a soothing backdrop for a plush couch from Montauk Sofa and a pair of barrel-back chairs atop a wool rug with a subtle pattern from Oscar Isberian.

The front den. Photo by Dustin Halleck.

The palette flows into the open great room, where a gray sectional sofa and a pair of wood-framed chairs create plenty of space for the entire family to cuddle up together and binge their favorite shows. Often disguised as art, the TV hangs above the custom limestone fireplace mantel, which is flanked by matching steel-framed console tables with ribbed doors from Croft House.

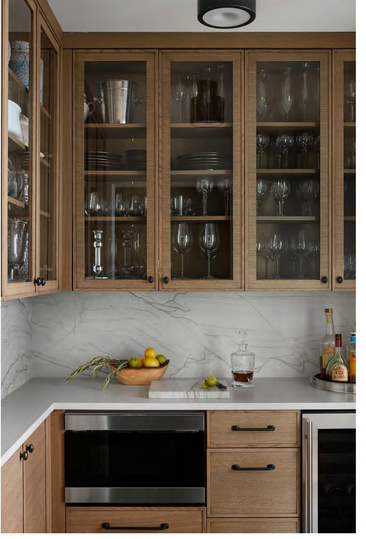
Artwork by Darren Oberto from Alley Gallery adds a one-of-a-kind element to the living room, where a sectional sofa from RH and chairs by Four Hands create tons of space for the family to spend time together. Photo by Dustin Halleck.

The space is open to the gleaming new kitchen, which Morton outfitted with white perimeter cabinetry and a cerused oak island, both with white Santorini quartzite countertops with subtle gray veining that pulls the whole look together. A pair of black pendants with an industrial edge tie in with both the windows and the custom blackened steel hood with stainless banding from ABT Electronics.

Offering function in a very fashionable form, the custom blackened steel hood with stainless accents from ABT Electronics grabs the spotlight in the open kitchen. Textural stools from RH add another dimension. Photo by Dustin Halleck.

The designer flipped the script in the butler's pantry, outfitting it with oak cabinetry — the uppers with glass doors – and an integrated quartzite countertop and backsplash.

For Wendy, having so much storage and a space to cook while conversing with the family has been a godsend. "I spend so much time in the kitchen," Wendy explains. "I cook a ton, I love it, and I'm good at it."



Accented with white quartzite countertops, the handsome oak cabinets in the butler's pantry offer tons of additional storage. The black ceiling light is from Urban Electric. Photo by Dustin Halleck.

Dinner is served in the new formal dining room, where a black and white rug sets the tone, grounding a linear wooden double-pedestal dining table from Palecek and chairs by Four Hands underneath a contemporary black chandelier. Abstract paintings by Dana DeAno from Alley Gallery in Evanston reinforce the contrasty color scheme.

An elegant black chandelier from Urban Electric, sculptural chairs from Four Hands, and abstract artwork by Dana DeAno from Alley Gallery in Evanston, juxtapose the white walls in the newly created formal dining room. Photo by Dustin Halleck.

"They lend a beautiful femininity to the space and soften the stronger lines of the table and windows," Morton explains. "This room is well-edited, yet every piece is strong enough to stand on its own."

According to Jodi, designing a family member's home carries unique challenges. "There's a whole different level of pressure, because you're going to be visiting it over and over again," she says, "but I'm so proud every time I walk in the house."

An upholstered bed and matching wooden side tables, all from RH, reflect the eldest daughter, Chloe's taste to a tee. The artwork is from Minted. Photo by Dustin Halleck.

Ann Sacks subway tile and a scalloped mosaic tile marble floor from Floor & Décor elevates the eldest daughter, Chloe's bathroom. The medicine cabinet is from RH.

That said, the two relished the rare opportunity to spend so much time together and both are thrilled with the outcome. "It was a special experience," Jodi says.

Wendy likewise enjoyed collaborating with her sister on the project, which wrapped up in March of 2020 when the Covid-19 lockdown was in full force. What better timing for a move near the lake, where Wendy and her eldest daughter took daily walks during the spring and summer.

"I can't even believe that I live here," Wendy adds. "Pinch me."