



**GLASS ACT**  
Ruthie Alan's earthy hues bring the main living space into harmony with its natural surroundings.

# WHERE EARTH MEETS SKY

A RIVER NORTH PENTHOUSE GETS A TONAL FACE-LIFT AND MARRIES INDOOR AND OUTDOOR LIVING.

By Katie Anne Orr  
Photography by Michael Robinson Photography

Cast a glance upward on a certain bustling street in River North and you'll see a Japanese garden in the sky. Overflowing from its 14th-floor perch atop a glass-encased residential tower, it's baffling—and undeniably beautiful. The work of world-renowned landscape architect Hoichi Kurisu, 3,000 square feet of foliage enfolds the tower's penthouse—and when the current owner first stepped into its sanctuary last year, he knew he'd found his new home. "After I left, I felt like I just had an hourlong massage at the Peninsula," he says.

Constantly jet-setting between cities and waking up to endless hotel-room walls, he was looking for a restorative place to call home—a haven with a little ingenuity and functional design behind it. "I was depressed with the series of white box after white box. It felt very homogenous," he says. "But I saw this place in winter—and even in winter, when you come off the elevator, it's spectacular." The space just needed a little revitalization since its original design by Richar Interiors in 2004. Enter: Ruthie Alan of Alan Design Studio. "It already had great decorating bones and large gestures, which the client loved, but the color palette really needed a face-lift after 10 years of basking in the sun," she says. "I basically restored everything back to its original beauty."

With the aspiration to make it feel organic— CONTINUED...



#### DIVINE DETAILS

Clockwise from above:  
The Nakashima walnut bed—arguably the furnishing gem of the space—pays homage to Japanese precision and simplicity; the home's tranquil tones belie the din of the River North neighborhood 14 floors beneath it; Alan's sandy wooden walls simultaneously enliven, lighten and bring a sense of stillness to the space.

...CONTINUED to fuse the inside with the outside—Alan reconstructed every surface in the home with smooth rift oak that complemented its earthy surroundings. She pulled back all of the existing flooring (previously carpeted) and replaced it with deep chocolate-hued wood, which she balanced against fresh sand-colored wooden walls. All of the gray living room furnishings were custom-made to blend with the stones on the other side of the glass, which were “placed with a slow, contemplative methodology to subconsciously create order and harmony,” says Alan.

The residence is sectioned solely with sliding doors to foster the open flow of the space. Alan fitted them all with woven grass cloth panels. She created a partition to accommodate a guest bedroom/office, using acid-etched glass walls to preserve its

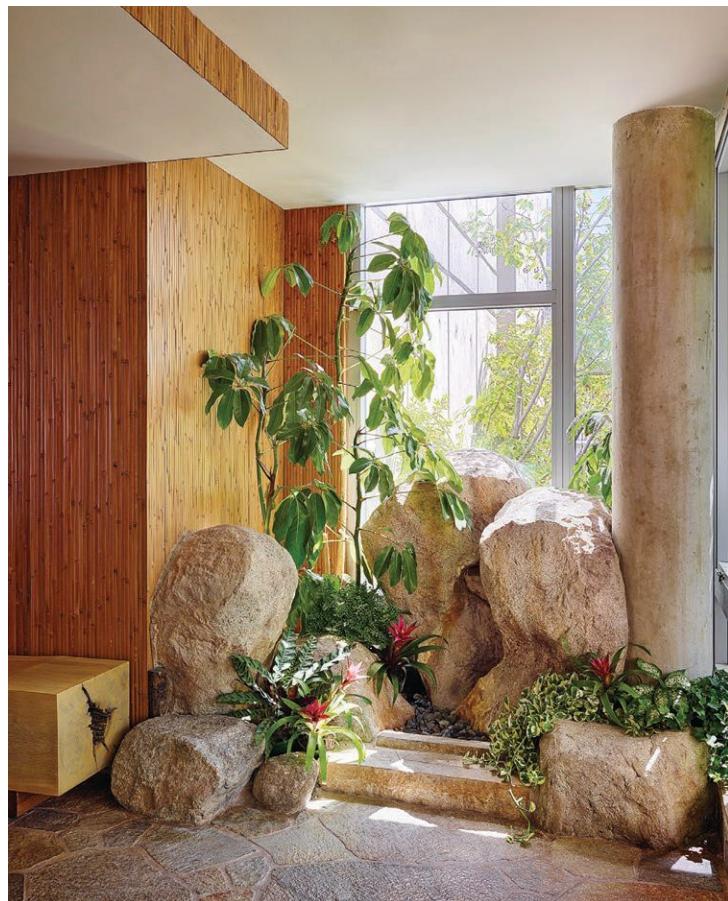


openness. She sourced a few complementary furnishings from favorite shops in Manhattan, including Andrianna Shamaris and BDDW, which provided the leather-and-black walnut bar stools that frame the kitchen island. An imported piece of Brazilian Pequi wood from Rotsen serves as the entryway bench.

But unmatched artistry is best seen in the master bedroom's Japanese walnut bed—designed by the celebrated woodworker George Nakashima's daughter, Mira Nakashima. To reveal its brilliance, “it should really be wrapped like a piece of sushi,” says Alan, demonstrating simple, tight tucks to its perimeter. Piled nearby on the petrified-wood night table are a dozen books. Reflective of the homeowner, they hint at a studious nature—essential for grasping the degree of precision put into this home and its garden.

Once annually, landscape CONTINUED...





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...CONTINUED architects return to fine-tune the outdoor greenery, using mini scissors to trim every needle of every pine tree as if pruning a bonsai. A drip irrigation system and heated soil beds accommodate the high-stress environment of the wind and frost.

"Japanese gardening is thousands of years old—very artifact-like and specific. [Kurisu] was thoughtful to drive growth in particular directions that are harmonious," says the homeowner.

"[The owner is] very meticulous about everything he does—and this place is more complex than most," adds broker Daniela Gheorghe. "It's why this place was made for him. A lot of heart has to go into it. You really have to love something to care for it constantly." ■

**URBAN OASIS**  
From top: The outdoor garden's generous greenery envelops the residence; the residence's luminous entryway.



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