



Precinct Penthouse “Once again, you’ve figured out a new way to make me feel at home with my art.”

CLIENT TO DESIGNER WHEN HE SAW THE FINISHED APARTMENT FOR THE FIRST TIME

SITE

Located on the top level of the Precinct apartment tower in Lorne St, Auckland, this penthouse commands almost 270 degree views from the Eastern Bays, across the harbour and cityscape to the Waitakere ranges.

One of four, the apartment is the only single level penthouse. The external elevations are largely glazed and open onto the expansive decks around the perimeter.

CLIENT BRIEF

The client is an international businessman who travels extensively, transiting through Auckland for short periods.

Because of its infrequent use by him, the apartment is also made available to artists both local and international, as a place to stay when they're in Auckland.

The brief called for an almost hotel room-like approach to its functionality whilst demanding a homely experience to alleviate the transitory nature of the stay.





MATERIALITY AND LIGHT

A rich material palette plays with texture and reflection rather than an overt materiality. The subtleties are evident in the gloss surfaces of the mosaic tiles in the bathrooms and the lacquered cabinetry throughout. These reflective surfaces are limited to the black finishes so that when concealed by the matt finished white doors or sliding panels a quietness is restored, lending the art and objects an increased presence.

Additional texture is added with the cork floor, an unusual choice that provides warmth, richness and a homeliness that supports the constant play between object container and place of respite.

Because the ceiling height is modest, in-ceiling lights have been deliberately eliminated to avoid distraction in the line of sight beyond the apartment.

Instead, an eclectic collection of lamps were located around the penthouse to allow zones to be lit individually, increasing the sense of intimacy. To enhance the connection between cityscape and apartment, the interior light levels are kept deliberately low allowing unhindered views of the surrounding city

The bathroom ceilings are backlit acrylic enabling a soft and diffuse light quality without the use of visible light fittings in either of these spaces, continuing the rationale of reduced visual disturbance without compromising practicality.

CONCEPT

As a serious collector of art and objects, the apartment was conceived as a container for a small portion of his collection. The importance of the architecture is paramount in its role as a mode for exhibition without proffering any sense of formal or curated display. Flexibility was critical to allow the regular rotation of a diverse and eclectic content.

Given its lofty location, the site called for a different approach to connecting with its surroundings. Rather than a relationship to the street, the apartment relates more immediately to the buildings surrounding it with the varied, colourful neon of the advertising and corporate logos adorning the skyline.

Work was commissioned from artists addressing the local conditions including an LED lightbox from Jim Speers signifying a new direction in his practice. The rhythmically cascading points of light are a nod to the flash and glow of the signs beyond the windows and serve to bring the cityscape right into the apartment. John Reynolds placed a large neon work on the exterior of the building closing the conversational loop between penthouse and cityscape.



FURNITURE

A large proportion of the furniture was designed specifically for this apartment. The three sofa/daybeds, the master bed and the bar and barstools were all commissioned as part of the fit out. This provided a rare opportunity for the interior designer to create both the architecture and furniture in one project.

The penthouse's modest proportions were taken into account. All furniture was designed with a low centre of gravity or slim proportions. Crucially, with the exception of the master bed, all the furniture serves more than one function.

The sofas become either day or overnight beds with the backrests and supports removable and the squabs sized for fitted single sheets. As a daybed, the backrests become pillows.

The bar and barstools were designed so that the stools could be stored within the bar and the bar itself becomes a display plinth for objects, belying its alternative function.

The master bed is designed seamlessly in two parts to enable its installation in an apartment with difficult access.



TECHNICAL RESOLUTION AND INNOVATION

The apartment was purchased in a partially complete state. Walls had been erected and services reticulated. The building plans revealed a design that intended two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a living room with fireplace, a dining room, kitchen and a laundry all shoehorned into 120m².

With the purchase finalised, construction was halted and a new plan devised consisting of a single wall dividing the entire space. All service areas were located along the internal boundary. This allowed the entire apartment to open itself to the city enabling openness to the view that few other city dwellings could achieve without compromising privacy.

Constraints with plumbed services dictated the location of the ensuite, but the kitchen and guest bathroom were repositioned against the rear wall utilising what would have been the laundry supply.

Similarly, the ventilation and air conditioning services posed a considerable obstacle to achieving a common ceiling level throughout the apartment. The mechanical ventilation system had to be designed and sized before a ceiling datum could be established to enable the flush mounted, floor to ceiling pivot doors to be installed.

All the amenity areas are concealed behind either pivoting doors or sliding panels that, when opened, reveal a secondary layer picked out in mirror or black gloss finishes. These at once give a sense of depth and a fourth dimension that doesn't exist. The tiny spaces become artificially enlarged, generously enhancing the modest proportions.

