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Apartment Atelier

Andrew Flesher's vintage space remains a work in progress

BY ALECIA STEVENS



PHOTO BY SUSAN GILMORE | STYLED BY DAVID ANGER

Andrew Flesher is a traveling man. The award-winning Minneapolis designer and partner of the interior design firm GunkelmanFlesher works on projects from Pasadena to New York, with long layovers in the Twin Cities. Despite his hectic schedule, he makes it a priority to attend to something personal: the continuing development of his art. For the past two years, his own home has become the source of this instruction, a grand experiment and, in his own words, "my atelier." ¶ A bit of a contrarian and always an original, Flesher never stands still. As the rich and famous of Minneapolis head to the river in droves, seeking wide-open, concrete loft spaces, Flesher "downsized," selling his own 2,400-square-foot loft in a prestigious development next to the new Guthrie—a space so striking and well appointed that it was featured in Metropolitan Home magazine. Last year, he bought a vintage, 1,098-square-foot apartment in the iconic 510 Groveland

building with more molding than you'll see this side of Paris and maybe the smallest kitchen in all of Minneapolis. What is no surprise, however, is that Flesher has created a masterpiece yet again with this exquisitely designed space. More than just another job well done, it reveals the making and maturation of a designer.

"I spent the last seven years in two different lofts," he says. "They were great for entertaining, but I got tired of the volumes of space that didn't have intimacy. I needed a change. I thought it would be an apartment in New York, where I am working these days." He planned to downsize, buy a little place in Minneapolis, and have some cash to spare for a second place in New York. When an apartment became available on the sixth floor of 510 Groveland, with spectacular views of St. Mark's bell tower, Loring Park, and the Basilica, he bought it within three days. Nine months later, he laughs because he knows himself too well. "I spent more restoring and furnishing this 1,098 square feet than I did on the whole 2,400-square-foot loft! So it looks like this is home for a while," he says. "There is always New York."

Flesher is, perhaps, his own most demanding client. He is compelled to design and, sanguine by nature, he needs change and challenge. The willingness to try new things is what allows a designer to grow. But experimentation can also be costly. Few clients have the faith or the bank account to hand over a key with the blessing: "Go at it. Be an artist. We'll pay for it." So he created a laboratory where he can play with the barrage of ideas that materialize in the middle of the night, while traveling, eating, or just being Flesher.

What is it like being your own designer? Can you displease the client?

"Of course," he says. "I took out a wall in here and had to put it back. I walked in the day it was removed, took a look and thought, 'Well, that's a mistake.' So I had it put back...and with all that molding!" The same thing happened with a pair of wooden x-framed chairs. He re-covered them after a month—they just didn't look right. "The only way to grow as a designer is to try new things," he says. "So I do it here. I call it my atelier, my workshop."

The result is striking and can scarcely be categorized stylistically; it might be called Bohemian if it was not so high end. "I decided that I wanted this apartment to be like a jewel," Flesher says. "I have been using many of these pieces and vendors for years with clients, but they never all ended up in one place, together. I could finally do that here. I wanted this to be a symposium of my favorite things."

He began by working with the elegance of the 1920s architecture and painted it white—moldings and all. He grounded the flooring with slightly darker neutrals: sisal carpeting in the main areas; delicate, shimmering mosaics for the kitchen; and hand-hewn white oak parquet for the entry that is simply waxed, in the European style. The result is a soft, luminous shell—a stage for the art, sculpture, and furnishings.



PHOTO BY SUSAN GILMORE

Flesher is drawn to strong form and texture, yet no single style dominates; the mix is almost madness. He unites French Louis XV side chairs with a 1950s Florence Knoll settee. He designed the custom bed as a prototype for a new line of furniture he is shopping around. Although stylistically traditional in leather, the frame is bolted together, giving it an industrial edge. A woven, African-inspired chair in the entry is by the French designer, Christian Astuguevieille. The living room chandelier is made of antlers. Old oil portraits of "fake" ancestors hang next to photography from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design art show.

His kitchen is minuscule—many of us have linen closets that are larger—yet it couldn't be more efficient or well dressed. Walls are lined to the ceiling in warm "Calcutta Gold" marble, while cabinets in cool, stainless steel provide contrast. A glass-front Sub-Zero suggests that he doesn't cook much and brings a bit of openness to the room. A small stool near the windows that overlook the city provides a solo seat where he can work on his laptop. Tucked away in this corner, the world is spread out below.

This tiny little experiment is almost complete and it seems to make him happy—or maybe just especially satisfied—for now. There is always New York, another idea, and another atelier. And that is the life of an artist who is compelled to design.

Alecia Stevens is a Minneapolis interior designer and frequent contributor to Midwest Home.

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