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## Room with a view

Basel's MET Architects have created an interior landscape for a seaside escape in Beirut that is surprising and sophisticated in equal measure. **TEXT: JOANNE MOLINA**



Designed to complement the view of the sea, the apartment features an eclectic mix of vintage and contemporary pieces. Built-in ebony panels showcase pieces such as the Arne Jacobson *Swan* chair and Saarinen *egg* chair. Oscar Niemeyer designed the dining table in the 80s for Swiss manufacturer Estel.



**If diamonds are forever** so is sophisticated interior design. So when a diamond dealer from Antwerp sought to customise an exquisite seaside escape in Beirut, his choice to create the stunning interior design was the internationally acclaimed Basel-based firm MET Architects.

Thomas Thalhofer and Roula Moharram, principals at MET Architects, were inspired by the breathtaking natural view, but creating the serene interiors (originally including an enclosed entrance, reception area and four ensuite rooms) on the 10th floor of the 22-floor building was a challenge.

"The client, unimpressed with the standard residential tower design of the 430-square-metre apartment pre-transformation, had purchased the space because of its exceptional, lush view," Thalhofer says. "Accustomed to life's finer things, the client sought the luxury of custom interiors which would reflect his cosmopolitan lifestyle – and accommodate the needs of his family."

Armed with a reputation for crafting dynamic, bespoke interiors in Lebanon and throughout Europe, Moharram took specific directives from her client during the eight-month renovation.

"There is no specific design style," she says. "It is a design that reflects a style of life – with a clear boundary between public and



A neutral palette created with colour, texture and light allows significant artwork and furnishings, such as an *Eames* lounge chair upholstered in unusually light leather, to become focal points in each room.



private. The reception area extends, surprises, fascinates and exhibits, while bedrooms are enclosed, private and cosy. Our client was clear about his need for a spacious reception area to entertain and display his art collection, as well as clearly delineated areas for his family's private life.

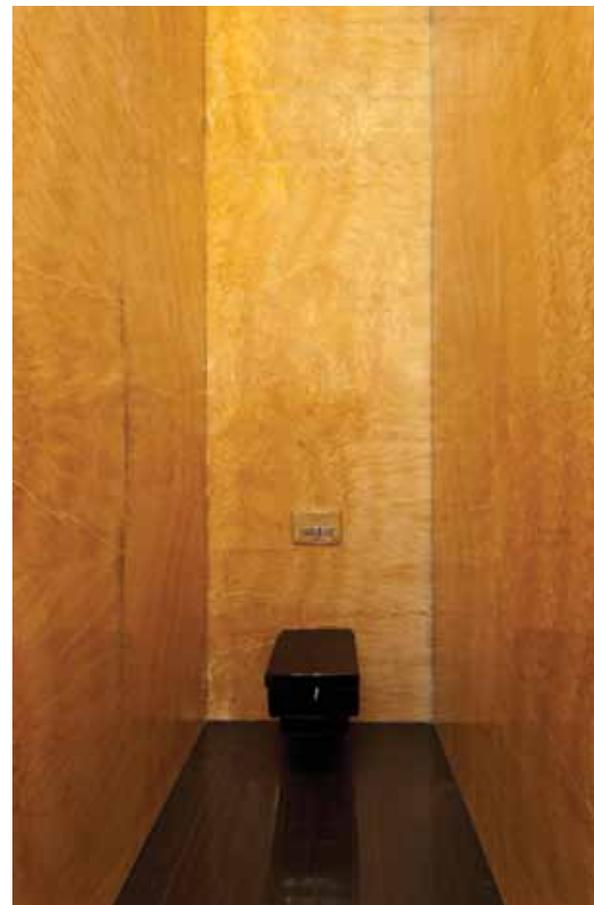
"The apartment overlooks the only remaining sandy beach in the heart of the city, so we really used the depth and drama of the view as our starting point. The difficulty was using a developer's standard residential layout. We needed to keep the core, the interior façade, structural walls and technical shaft of the apartment the same while dramatically altering the interior."

Despite the issues, the transformation was sublime -- beginning with the lobby that houses the lift's entrance. "The walls and floor are covered with a grey Italian travertine cut to size, and an extra-large ceiling chandelier instantly creates a dramatic setting."

As guests are ushered through the entrance and the reception area they are immediately struck by an illuminated stretched ceiling that diffuses welcoming, warm light.

The reception is double orientated, extending directly into an outdoor/indoor loggia. With its monochromatic white surfaces, it is a canvas for the client's personal collection of vintage furniture and art. "A customised counter, 18 metres long, was designed to integrate all kind of elements, such as bar equipment, a music system, storage and radiator, keeping the clearness of the space and enhancing the four-metre height of the room".

However, the unique details are what make this residential project special. "Overall, we used a combination of built-in elements with selected vintage furniture from the Fifties, and some comfortable contemporary furniture," Thalhofer says. "The grey-blue pair of iconic *Barcelona* chairs (reception area)



Thomas Thalhofer and Roula Moharram, principals at MET Architect, used natural materials and the power of illumination to create luxurious serenity throughout the apartment.



was purchased from the Kenzo Tange building (American Medical Association building) in Chicago.

"Other notable vintage pieces include the iconic Arne Jacobsen *Swan* and *Egg* chairs and the *Eames* lounge chair, upholstered in unusually light leather. The late Oscar Niemeyer designed the dining table in the Eighties for the Swiss company Estel. Hilde Cornelissen Interiors in Antwerp selected fabrics and carpets. Various ateliers using a palette designed especially for the apartment made the custom carpets. To add depth and contrast we also chose to create a series of ebony wood wall panels and sliding doors to camouflage the entrance to the private areas – the private family room and corridor leading to the bedrooms."

But the luxurious wood tonality is beautifully juxtaposed by an expansive, radiant white. "Impossible to avoid, because of the length, the bedroom corridor was opened up with white glossy surfaces and the continuation of the

illuminated ceiling," Moharram says. "It creates brightness using reflection, which avoids a claustrophobic feeling."

Each bedroom has a distinct personality that suits its occupant, and boasts a suite with its own bathroom and dressing area. Luxurious carpeting is the foundation for each boudoir and the restful colour palette was selected to frame the outdoor views.

Each bathroom was treated with a different material, including statuary marble for the master bathroom, various types of Bisazza tile for the children bathrooms, and onyx walls and lit tiles for the guest bathroom. "With its four-metre high mirrored ceiling, the guest bathroom gives a surprising and unexpected feeling," Thalhofer says.

Thanks to MET Architects this former dull and uninspired space is now a surprising, dynamic seaside companion. **ID**