

let there be

light



*A dark, small apartment is transformed
into an open, bright weekend getaway.*

Text Beth Dunlop **Photos** Jerry Rabinowitz



The architect Jeffrey Silberstein chose all white — walls and furniture alike — with judiciously placed accents of color in this Brickell Key apartment.



STEP INTO THIS BRICKELL KEY APARTMENT, and you are wrapped in sunshine. It is a tiny apartment – just 1,000 square feet – but in many ways it is larger than life. There is an expansive view – the brilliant aqua of Biscayne Bay and intense blue of the Miami sky with Fisher Island and the Port of Miami beyond – and all that light streaming in through the windows. “I wanted it to be infused with light,” says Jeffrey Silberstein.

Silberstein, a Delray Beach architect and interior designer, was charged with transforming what had been a cramped condo into a sunny, airy retreat. He knew from the start that this apartment needed to be white so as not to compete with the view beyond. He wanted to maximize that connection to the view not only to link apartment to place, but also as a way of making a small space bigger.

The owners, a New York neurosurgeon and his wife, wanted a weekend getaway, a place to unwind from their busy lives. They asked Silberstein to take their too-dark two-bedroom unit and open it up. Their mandate to the architect: to create a

soothing space where they would feel relaxed and know they were in Miami, not Anywhere, USA.

“When you walked in, you were in a little dark vestibule,” Silberstein says. “You couldn’t see the bay. You had no idea where you were. Everything was dark and tiny.” He started out by gutting the apartment. The dark little foyer quickly became a mere memory. Silberstein eliminated one of the two bedrooms and one of the two full baths. He moved the kitchen off to one side to create a more ample living room. “Now when you walk in you look right back out at Biscayne Bay,” he says.

The original kitchen blocked views and interrupted the flow of the space. Now it is incorporated into the single large space that accommodates living and dining (and cooking, of course). “I wanted the kitchen to disappear,” he says.

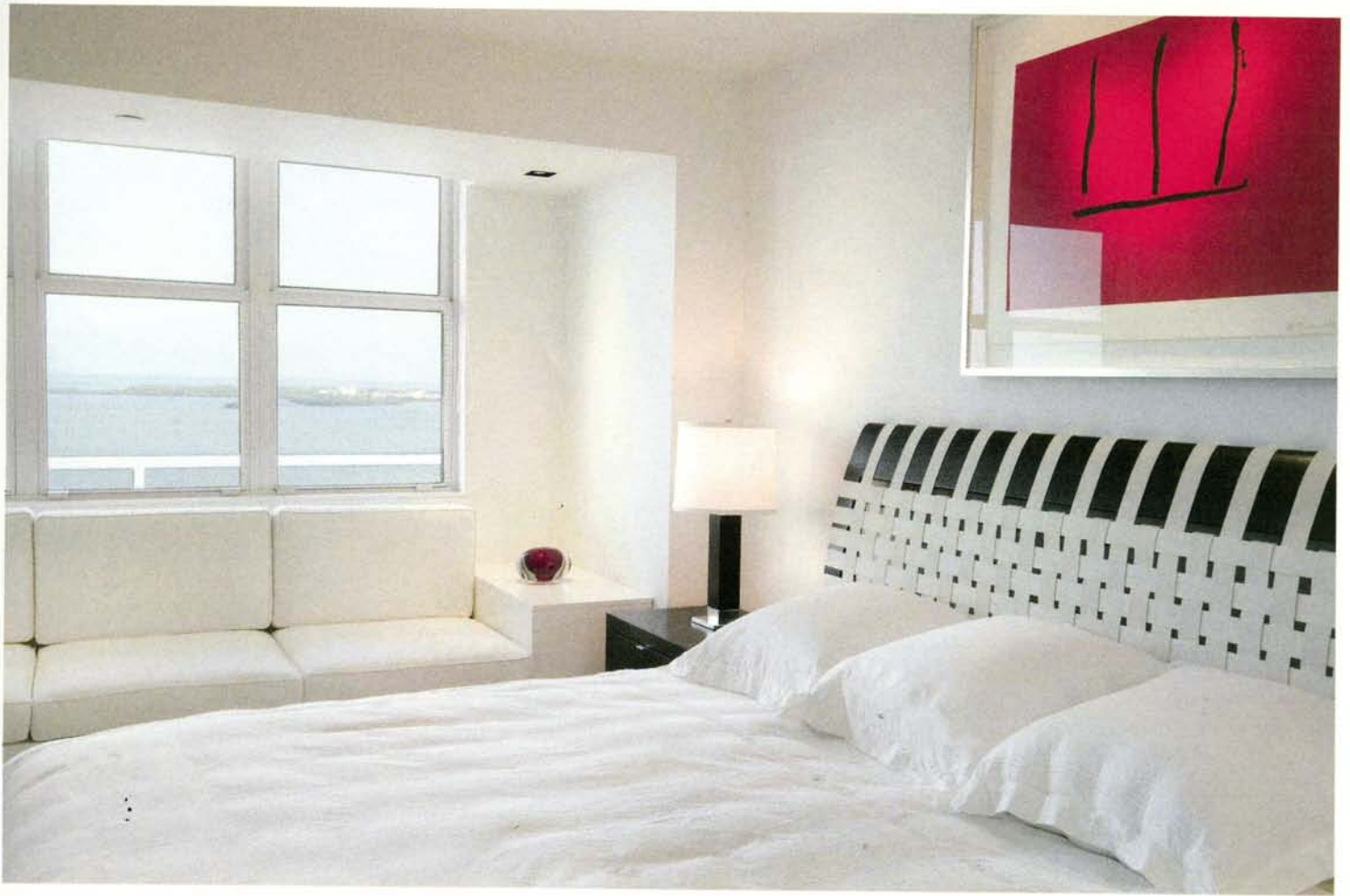
Silberstein designed built-in couches to sit under windows – at both ends of the apartment – that started three feet above the floor. This gesture was twofold in its purpose. First, it made good use of a space that otherwise could have been



For the dining area, Silberstein chose a table by Eero Saarinen and chairs by Charles and Ray Eames. OPPOSITE: Upholstered furniture in the living room is by Christian Liagre.



The kitchen was designed with cabinets intended to seem almost wall-like. OPPOSITE: In the bedroom, a Robert Motherwell painting hangs above the bed designed by Christian Liagre.



wasted, and second, it maximized the seating areas in an apartment with a too-small floor area “to give an extra feel of space,” he says.

Simplicity rules. Most of the walls and furniture are white. (The exception here: panels of exotic dark Macassar ebony – a point-counterpoint.) Much of the furniture is from a single source – it is designed by Christian Liagre and sold at Holly Hunt – in order to bring a calmness and a consistency to the design. Other pieces were custom designed. The dining area features a white Saarinen table with dark walnut Eames side chairs. Floors are pale honed limestone. Even the rugs, which are from Odegard, are minimalist, with an almost imperceptible pattern.

Silberstein used a series of columns to further design the space, but the columns do double-duty as light fixtures. The lighting is incorporated into the series of columns that dot the space. By day, the feeling of the apartment changes hourly, as the sun moves from east to west. But at night, Silberstein says, “the apartment takes on a totally different attitude.”

For this apartment, Silberstein was architect, interior designer, decorator and art consultant. The last was integral, he says, to the entire design. He selected a painting by the in-demand German artist Markus Linnenbrink for the living room, as well as a Robert Motherwell for the bedroom. In the dining room is a painting by Robert Flynn, an artist who worked in Miami during the middle years of an all-too-brief career (he died last year at 39, after a heart attack). Silberstein also sought out particular decorative objects, including Murano glass pieces bought at the Soho outpost of the Italian glass purveyor Salvati.

Control, he says, is key. “When you’re doing a space that is as small and intimate as this is, you really need that single hand.” In this case, the apartment is, as much as anything, a guided journey. “You walk in, and right away you look back out and you see Biscayne Bay. Everything is white and the space is infused with natural light. You are drawn to the beauty beyond.” Then slowly, the eye adapts, and the beauty within takes center stage, making it all – as the architect intended – of a piece. ■