



Geoffrey Hodgdon

FORMA's design transforms the 1970s condo into a loft-like space. In the new living/dining room, doorways extend up to the ceiling for a more streamlined look.



BEFORE



BEFORE

The traditional fireplace is replaced with a clean-lined mantel.



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Upstairs, Downstairs:

A Successful Collaboration

by Denise Liebowitz

The loft phenomenon has moved south from Manhattan, sweeping through Washington neighborhoods and turning up in some pretty unlikely places. Like Beekman Place, an enclave of bland, 1970s Colonial-style row houses just off 16th Street, NW, a stone's throw from Meridian Hill Park. In this conveniently located, if architecturally uninspired setting, Andreas Charalambous, AIA, and his client have brought a tired and dated interior into the 21st century, banishing crown moldings, paneled doors, and dingy hallways, and leaving in their place clean-lined, wide open, loft-like spaces.

Meral Karasulu, a Turkish-born economist with the International Monetary Fund, moved into her two-bedroom duplex five years ago as a renter. Almost immediately, she began to dream about transforming the apartment into something more elegant and European. "I wanted the space to be as open as possible—uncluttered and simple. I knew all the things I wanted to get rid of, but I didn't know what to do after that."

Help was close at hand, in the downstairs apartment in fact. As luck would have it, architect Charalambous, principal of FORMA Design, had bought the duplex unit below Karasulu and embarked on a total renovation. "I was so impressed by what Andreas was doing," says Karasulu. "It was neutral and understated, and I admired it immediately."

Once Karasulu purchased her upstairs unit, architect and client set to work. "Meral had been living in the apartment and had been thinking very carefully about what she wanted, so the planning phase moved quickly from a starting sketch," Charalambous explains. "It was an exercise in elimination," says the homeowner.

Charalambous began by reconfiguring the entry foyer to open up the space and bring in more light. Because Karasulu is an accomplished cook, a state-of-the-art kitchen was a top priority. Out came the dark '70s cabinets and linoleum floor. In went sleek Silestone quartz counters, Poliform cabinetry, and sandblasted glass backsplashes and cabinet fronts. Karasulu insisted on a clean, horizontal kitchen design, and her architect delivered. She was also determined to banish clutter. "I wanted a kitchen that had a place for everything," the homeowner says, showing off an efficient and space-saving pullout pantry.

Charalambous replaced the hodgepodge of flooring materials with a unifying sweep of maple hardwood that begins in the kitchen and extends through the dining and living areas. Raised-panel doors were either eliminated or switched with flush seamless ones that almost disappear from view. A clean-lined mantel replaces the traditional fireplace treatment, and doorways and hallways now extend up to the ceiling for a more streamlined look.

The top floor of the duplex with two bedrooms and two baths continues the clean modernist sensibility. Silestone counters reappear in both baths, and the maple floors and neutral colors echo those found on the first floor.

As an IMF employee, Karasulu worked for extended periods in Korea, and she admires the Asian design aesthetic. This influence is most clearly seen in her bedroom, where custom-designed Shoji screens extend across one wall of closets. On the opposite wall, Charalambous designed a simple but dramatic wall treatment featuring cutout niches for strategically placed tea lights.

Furnishings—mostly Italian—are spare and complement the modern envelope. "I was so happy to clear out all the old stuff," says Karasulu. "Plus it was a good excuse for furniture shopping trips to Milan!"

“Andreas gave me courage,” says the homeowner in describing the collaboration with her architect. “He always took my ideas a step further. For instance, he really had to talk me into that bedroom wall, but now it’s one of my favorite things. And on my own I never would have thought of extending the doorways up to the ceiling for this open look.”

For his part, the architect says of Karasulu, “Meral is the kind of client who is very informed. She had done all her homework in advance, and all I had to do was give her some options.”

“Listen to your architect,” is Karasulu’s advice to those embarking on a renovation project. “I didn’t take Andreas’ advice in selecting a general contractor. It turned out to be a mistake that added several months to the job.” The homeowner also reports satisfaction with the project’s budget; the final cost came in 25 percent below the maximum she had anticipated.

Charalambous has spent most of his career in Washington and tracked the growing sophistication of his clients over the years. “Too many developers still think it’s all about American Colonial. But Washington has become such an international city; it’s not middle America. Americans today travel abroad frequently, and there are so many more international clients. The standard, traditional product just doesn’t appeal to them. They know good design, and their expectations are higher.”

As the next generation of Washington renovators surveys the city’s large stock of dated, traditionally styled housing, they can be inspired by the modern and elegant space Charalambous and Karasulu have created in Beekman Place. 🏡

A Silestone counter graces the renovated bathroom. In the master bedroom, architect Andreas Charalambous, AIA, designed a wall with cutout niches for tea lights. “It’s one of my favorite things,” owner Meral Karasulu says of her new bedroom wall.

