



Dallas-based interior designer Alice Cottrell's loftlike apartment. Below: The floor plan of the 700-square-foot space. See Resources.

Open-Minded

Eliminating walls and banishing clutter, an interior designer turns her claustrophobic apartment into a free-flowing, sleek retreat. Interview by Mitchell Owens

ELLE DECOR: What was so bad about your apartment that it required a gut renovation?

Alice Cottrell: It was a complete museum piece from 1963, from the Howard Johnson—blue tile in the bath to the shag carpeting everywhere else. Its saving graces were the floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the park and pool area and the nine-foot ceilings.

ED: And you didn't like the floor plan either?

AC: It's a little more than 700 square feet but felt even smaller. The galley kitchen was entirely enclosed, and the rooms were all separated by walls, so it was totally claustrophobic. I wanted to take the walls down and enjoy the view. My business partner, Rick Rozas, is a genius with layout, and he developed the floor plan.

ED: What made the new floor plan a better solution than the original?

AC: It opened everything up. The kitchen now is open to the living room, and the wall between the living room and the bedroom was torn down too. There isn't a door in the place, which is fine, because privacy wasn't a top priority.

ED: So it's really all about construction trickery then?

AC: Exactly. The sight lines go right through the apartment to the park outside without being blocked by partitions. I can stand in the kitchen drinking coffee and look at the trees and birds. The television was built into a wall to reduce visual clutter, and I had ▶





The custom-made 16-foot sofa makes the room appear larger than it is.

the aluminum window frames painted white to match the walls. In addition to removing all the interior doors, I took out the thresholds, too, so everything is at the same level and has an easy flow. Tearing up the shag carpeting revealed the concrete floor, which I topcoated with another layer of cement and a polished-wax finish. It's a very easy-to-clean place.

ED: Your decisions sound stylish but practical.

AC: I worked as a hotel designer for two decades before I changed my focus to residential five years ago, and if I've learned one thing from that experience, it's that rooms have to be practical and hold up to abuse. Which is why I use a lot of commercial fabrics in my jobs. People have dogs and kids, and a sophisticated, supersoft fabric that will last is a godsend. You don't want to reupholster for at least ten years if you don't have to.

ED: Did the renovation require an enormous amount of work and disruption?

AC: Most of it was done in phases over nearly three years, including six weeks to redo the Sheetrock because the walls and ceilings had hideous textured surfaces. Though I bought the apartment in 2007, I only installed the Bulthaup b1 kitchen last year. I love it because it has no visible hardware, just finger grips, so it looks more clean and sleek—and it's made of white Corian and lacquer, so I can spill red wine on the counters and it comes right up with Lysol.

ED: The palette is pretty peaceful—there's not a lot of color or pattern.

AC: I look at fabrics and patterns all day, so I was happy for this place to be like a chic prison cell. I settled on a simple color scheme—gray and white—and one primary fabric: a luxurious, extremely soft commercial material that feels like chinchilla. I used it on my Womb chair and on the sofa I designed.

ED: Tell me about the sofa.

AC: It's 16 feet long, but that's the fun of it—it makes the room feel gigantic. When I come home I head right there to stretch out and watch Bravo. In front of it are two tea-height



The minimalist Bulthaup kitchen opens onto the living room.



A mohair-upholstered stool and a Ligne Roset table.



A Saarinen Womb chair and ottoman are upholstered in the same velvety fabric as the sofa.



The bedroom, with ottomans that are used as extra seating when Cottrell entertains.

What the Pros Know

- To create a spacious feeling, Cottrell cleaned house. She removed all interior doors and thresholds, raised doorways to the ceiling, and paved the entire unit in waxed concrete to maintain visual flow.
- Allowing a single fabric to dominate the decoration is another visual trick. Cottrell chose a velvety material to cover two primary pieces of furniture—a custom-designed sofa and Eero Saarinen's classic Womb chair. The home's gray-and-white palette enhances the open atmosphere too.
- Completing renovations over time can be easier on your wallet. "I figured out what I needed to change as I became more familiar with the apartment," Cottrell says. "And doing the work in phases allowed me to save for what I really wanted. I used \$30 rolling racks for my clothes until I could afford my Poliform closet."

A Poliform walk-in closet is concealed behind a wall covered in a Cole & Son damask wallpaper.



Corian-top tables from Ligne Roset I use for dining, with three stools upholstered in golden, ivory, and black mohair. I can also pull up the furry Arvid ottomans that sit at the foot of my bed. When a lot of people are here for a party, they perch on the white-lacquer covers my contractor built to conceal the heating and air-conditioning units below the windows. It's a brilliant design: The covers are mounted on casters, so they just slide out when a repairman needs access or I have to change the filters.

ED: You call this place a chic prison cell, but not many cells have sexy wallpaper.

AC: It's a flocked-damask-on-Mylar pattern by Cole & Son that I used to delineate the apartment's public and private areas. It's a classic old-fashioned motif but executed in a modern way. I love texture, and the silvery background just makes it glow at night. People get scared when you say minimalist, but that doesn't always mean polished chrome and black leather. ■