ARTISTIC AERIE

AN ATLANTA HIGH-RISE IS THE BACKDROP FOR A FAR-RANGING COLLECTION OF EXTRAORDINARY OBJECTS.
“MY GOAL IN FIVE YEARS IS TO OWN NOTHING MORE THAN A BATHING SUIT. I'D LIKE TO SELL IT ALL AND LIVE IN A FUNKY PLACE WHERE I CAN CATCH MY OWN FISH,” QUIPS MIMI WILLIAMS. Anyone who knows the Atlanta-based interior designer might find such a game plan hard to imagine. Williams is one of the city’s top-tier antiques dealers, with more than 35 years of collecting under her belt—and five storage units filled to the brim. For years she lived in historic Ansley Park, where she transformed the interior of a three-bedroom Craftsman home into a model of American Federal style. “I erased all the moldings to impart pure lines and symmetry,” she explains.

Williams’s passion for early architecture makes her move to a two-bedroom on the 42nd floor of a Buckhead high-rise all the more surprising. But the designer was looking to downsize. And the 3,600-square-foot space features a commanding enfilade of period-style archways running the length of the hallway. It clinched the deal: “I was lucky to find such gorgeous detailing already in place,” she says. “It suited me so well.”

Indeed, the all-white apartment presents an elegant foil for the designer’s furnishings and art—if only a fraction of it. Williams, who calls herself an “expressive modernist with a curatorial eye,” chose the cream of her collections for the glamorous T-shaped space, bringing together 18th-, 19th-, and 20th-century antiques with architectural salvage and contemporary art. “I’ve always been fond of cultures collid-
ing. What's more sexy than a well-loved piece of architecture next to a modern painting?” she asks. It's not everyone who can combine a pair of 1940s Frances Elkins loop chairs with a 19th-century goatskin-veneered Italian bar, a set of 10th-century Chinese urns, and art by Mexican, Swedish, and American artists—as Williams has done in her foyer. The designer does express a pang of regret when she talks about letting go of the seven-foot-long, exotic-wood-and-lucite desk built for F.W. Woolworth in the 1960s. “It was my white elephant. It commanded a room!” she says. Hopelessly hooked on travel, Williams has set up her home as a 3-D travelogue, albeit one from a land of neutrals. “It's true I'm known for working in blacks, whites, grays and naturals,” she says, “I like a palette that sets off my things.”

Unlike her previous place, which was “all walls,” the apartment has 360-degree views of the city through handsome casement windows, which Williams leaves curtainless for full drama. “I'm someone who eats out all the time, but now I want to be at my dining table with those million-dollar views. I did give in to Venetian blinds in my bedroom, but I usually let Atlanta wake me up.” So much less wall space pushed the art lover to live with only the pieces she loves the most. Among her favorites? The late-1950s Cubist painting by Italian artist Duilio Barnabé that hangs over a 19th-century Ionic capital in the living room. She won it decades ago at an auction, after bidding on it all night long, certain she couldn't live without it. “If the place were on fire, I'd grab the cat and that painting,” she says. And perhaps her swimsuit.
Williams used metallic fixtures and golden-hued details to give the guest room a subtle touch of glamour. Bed, 19th-c. Italian giltwood in white leather. Opposite: In the master bedroom, bed skirt, Ann Gish. Paintings, from left to right: Timothy Tew, Samuel Papazian, G. Nyman.