

**Traditional and Modern Design Elements Converge in a Washington, D.C. Condominium Property**  
*Published: July 01, 2008*

By Eric Inman, project manager and designer, Hickok Cole Architects, Washington, D.C.

Kenyon Square is a 153-unit high-end residential condominium building in the newly revitalized neighborhood of Columbia Heights in Washington, D.C. The developer wanted a design that appealed to an older, more established client and younger professionals and to differentiate itself from its retro-modern neighbors. The scope of the interior designer's services consisted of the common spaces, including the main and secondary lobbies, lounges, corridors, elevators and library.

The resulting design concept created a balance and tension within each space of the traditional versus the modern. This was achieved in a variety of ways. One technique was to exaggerate or manipulate certain traditional elements to the degree that they became an object unto themselves, with memory of the past but a presence of the modern. Another was to insert modern elements among more traditional elements creating quiet tension.

Interesting results came from this approach. For instance, the double-height lounge is traditionally designed with dark raised wood panels and pilasters, beams, crown moldings, coffered ceilings and dark wood flooring. The coffer recesses, though, have a brushed stainless steel inlay with modern pendant light fixtures. The modern, concrete, Mondrian-like fireplace is the centerpiece of the lounge and creates a quiet tension with the traditional.

The double-height lobby contains similar detailing to the lounge. An example of manipulation of the traditional can also be seen in the grand stair within the lobby. The stair is constructed of dark stained wood treads and railings. The materials are reminiscent of the traditional, and the design and detailing of the railings are modern manipulations of the traditional. The posts are stainless steel with dark stained wood concentric circle panels between.

Other examples of manipulations of the traditional can be seen in the common corridors and elevator lobbies. Traditional chair rails line the common corridors. At the upper floors, the dark wood rail is modernized in shape, and an accent color stripes the chair rail to demarcate the different floors. At the elevator lobbies, the concept of coffering is utilized on the walls at high traffic points. These millwork installations mimic the grid of the coffering but are, in essence, a grid of frames that display photographic art.

The most apparent manipulation of the traditional is the modern coffers that line the unit corridor ceilings. These coffers are pure rectilinear forms of white painted drywall. The centers are recessed and have a brushed stainless steel inlay. One recessed downlight is centered in each coffer. The coffers are separated from each other, spaced evenly so they appear to be a syncopated rhythm of individual coffered cubes.

Exaggeration of the traditional was used with some of the wood trim elements. The frames in the lounge are scaled in proportion to their size--roughly five inches wide--and reflect an art nouveau

organic shape. The large four-ft. oculus above the door to the lounge is enlarged in size. To further emphasize its grand size, the trim around the oculus is also exaggerated, approximately nine-in. wide, using the same profile as the lounge frames. At the unit entries, the same profile is used and is further exaggerated to a 15-in.-wide version, becoming an object unto itself. Within all of the frame profiles, the tension between the traditional and the modern also exists. A rigid orthogonal stainless steel profile is inlaid the organic form, creating another quiet tension.

The finishes selected in the project repeat the tension between the two styles with vibrant reds and brushed stainless steel, softened by a more traditional warm palette. The red paint in the lounge is rich in color, but used in a way that reflects the traditional and modern simultaneously. The furniture was selected such that the base materials are dark in color, reflecting the traditional, while the upholstery is light in tone to respond to the modern. The shape of the furniture was selected to be low and wide to accentuate the verticality of the space. The finish of the concrete elements at the fireplace and at the reception desk exemplifies this tension. Concrete, typically seen in modern design, is known to feel cold. The concrete color was chosen to be warm, creating tension within the material.

The lighting throughout the building was selected to interplay between the modern and traditional. An example of this is the chandeliers in the main lobby. The fixture is a play on the more traditional candelabra that can be seen in medieval churches, but uses modern stainless steel for the frame, and glass cylinders mimic the original candles that were once used.

The concept of balance and tension of the two styles at Kenyon Square welcomes those who appreciate the traditional and the modern while not offending each other. The tension keeps the user visually engaged in his surroundings, while the balance makes the space comforting and inviting. The design is reminiscent both of historic Washington, D.C. and of the revitalized city today.