

INTERIOR DESIGN[®]

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resi-on-high



the rules of the game

For an apartment overlooking the Danube in Budapest, Hungary, Ramy Fischler Studio applied precepts of an ancient Indian system of architecture, along with its own savoir faire

*text: **ian phillips**
photography: **stephan juillard***





Previous spread: In the living area of a three-bedroom apartment in Budapest, Hungary, by Ramy Fischler Studio, Pierre Paulin's Pascha lounge chairs pair with a custom sofa, all seating selections based on principles of Vastu Shastra, an ancient Indian design philosophy that requires furniture in an "earth zone" to be low and grounded, with no legs or feet.

Top: Comprising wool bouclé-upholstered cushions perched on a travertine-slab base, the sofa sits on European oak flooring under a custom tufted-nylon rug.

Center: A large porthole window connects the ash-paneled study to the living-dining area. **Bottom:** A series of custom floor-to-ceiling vitrines separates the living area from the central hallway.

Opposite: Ceramics by Hungarian artists populate the vitrines' oak-veneered floating shelves, while a pair of custom chairs with bronze arms, upholstered backs, but no seats nestle beneath the study porthole.



Ramy Fischler Studio prides itself on the diversity of its work. Recent projects include a smart fridge, an Hermès perfume store in New York, a line of self-produced furniture, and Twitter's office in Paris, where the French firm is based and in the process of implementing a new

master plan to harmonize the café and restaurant terraces on the Champs-Élysées. From time to time, the studio accepts the odd residential commission. But as principal Ramy Fischler emphasizes, "If we take one on, it has to allow us a certain amount of creativity to develop something unique."

Recently, an entrepreneur with interests in Hungary approached Fischler with what was certainly a singular assignment. He had bought five apartments in a new luxury development with sweeping views of Budapest—one for his own use, the others for guests—that he wanted decorated in more or less identical style. Fischler took the bait. "We spent a year on his unit, defining exactly what he wanted," the designer says of the 3,750-square-foot, three-bedroom floor-through, which has an additional 1,100 square feet of outdoor space. "It wouldn't have made sense to do something different in the others. The décor fits him like a glove and duplicating it means he can give people the same experience as staying with him, only they have their own space."

The client had another very distinct demand: The design should adhere strictly to the principles of Vastu Shastra, the traditional Indian system of architecture. "It's used to determine the layout of everything from religious to domestic spaces," Fischler says, noting that the ethos is "simple and frugal." One of its precepts is that the center of a home should be an empty space ➤





free from obstructions like columns or staircases (a requirement satisfied by the apartment's mid-floor entry hall). And each area in the house is related to one of the four elements—fire, water, earth, and air—to which distinct design rules and color palettes are attached.

Fischler admits that applying such edicts was not always easy, even given the apartment's generous proportions. "The ideal locations according to Vastu Shastra for faucets, drainage, the kitchen, and so on were often in total contradiction to what was in place in the rest of the building," he reports. Among the changes he had to make to his original plans was the position of the beds. "Normally I like to have them facing a window so there's an equal amount of light on both sides," he explains. "But that was impossible here because they needed to be turned toward the north." Since the living area is in an "earth zone," which requires furniture to be low and grounded, none of the seating could have legs or feet. Hence the custom sofas comprising large cushions perched on travertine-slab bases. And in an adjacent sitting nook with a somewhat Japanese aesthetic, two chairs have bronze arms and upholstered backs but no seats, the idea being that, supported by the frame, you sit directly on the floor.

The living-dining room boasts a full-length terrace overlooking the Danube and the imposing Hungarian Parliament Building on the far bank. Vastu Shastra aside, Fischler was determined to create as open a space as possible, reveling in the peerless view and enhancing the great natural light. He did so partly by installing a trio of floor-to-ceiling glass storage units that double as quasi-transparent partitions separating the airy room from the center hallway and the kitchen. The massive vitrines are outfitted with substantial wooden shelves that appear to float weightlessly in the void. "These units are incredibly complex," Fischler notes. In fact, they took six months to develop due to his insistence that there be no visible support system: Transparent glue and hidden mechanisms inside the boxy shelves were used instead. "There's often something that's a little extraordinary in my residential projects," the designer adds.

Fischler favored natural materials throughout, the most striking being the rammed-earth clay plaster applied in layers on the walls and ceiling of the main hallway. "It's the most simple and sophisticated material there is," he says. "I like the way it looks as if different strata have been piled on top of each other." ➔

Opposite top, from left: Hand-applied rammed-earth plaster clads the walls and ceiling of the hallway, which morphs seamlessly into the galley kitchen. Jason Miller's Mado chandelier hangs above the study's desk, chairs, and rug, all custom.

Opposite bottom, from left: The same chairs surround the custom dining table, over which loops a bespoke fixture comprising strings of LED-lit alabaster cubes. Fabric panels encase the serene entry hall, where GramFratesi's Bat lounge chair joins a custom sandblasted-glass table.

Below: Three different shades of velvet upholster the walls of the main bedroom, in which custom furnishings include the sconces, bed, nightstands, bench, and rug.





Top: Ramy Fischler Collection's Walter nightstand sits beneath a custom scone in a wool flannel-lined guest bedroom. **Center:** Vico Magistretti's Atollo table lamp and Eero Saarinen's Executive chair serve the main bedroom's built-in desk made of *tay*, an African wood, which cantilevers from the oak-paneled wall. **Bottom:** Verde serpentine stone wraps the tub area of the main bathroom.

Opposite: In the second guest bedroom, this one paneled in silk and cotton satin, a sculpture by Hungarian ceramicist Simon Zsolt József gets its own niche.



Other walls are clad in wood veneers like ash and *tay*, a West African timber, while the entry hall and bedrooms are swaddled in sound-buffering fabric paneling, a response to the client's sensitivity to noise.

Fischler's overall aim

was to create not only a tranquil environment decibel-wise but also a visually soothing one. "There's a sort of sobriety and calm to the whole space," he says. No doubt the principles of Vastu Shastra contribute to that, but he believes the rigor of the architectural detailing also plays its part. "For me, the framework has to be perfect. When each line is precise, it brings a sense of composure," he asserts. "That's always the goal I set myself."

PROJECT TEAM

FRÉDÉRIC ALZEARI; FLORENCE VLEMELINX; XIAO YE ZHANG; ESTELLE TRAN; RAMY FISCHLER STUDIO. LIGHT IS MORE: LIGHTING CONSULTANT. SAFA: CUSTOM FURNITURE WORKSHOP.

PROJECT SOURCES

FROM FRONT AU GRÉ DU VERRE: CUSTOM COCKTAIL TABLES (LIVING AREA). **MAAMI HOME:** SIDE TABLE. **NORMANN COPENHAGEN:** OTTOMANS. **RUBELLI:** SOFA FABRIC (LIVING AREA), PANEL FABRIC (SECOND GUEST BEDROOM). **EPOCA:** CUSTOM SOFAS (LIVING AREA), CUSTOM CHAIRS (NOOK). **LASVIT:** **MANOOI:** CUSTOM CEILING FIXTURE (LIVING-DINING AREA). **GUBI:** LOUNGE CHAIRS (LIVING AREA), ARMCHAIRS (ENTRY, GUEST BEDROOM). **ROLL & HILL:** CHANDELIER (STUDY). **FERM LIVING:** GLASSES, BOWL (STUDY), TEAPOT (KITCHEN). **LIGNE ROSET:** CHAIRS (STUDY, DINING AREA). **GAGGENAU:** APPLIANCES (KITCHEN). **ÉLITIS:** PANEL FABRIC (MAIN BEDROOM). **D'ARGENTAT:** CUSTOM NIGHTSTANDS. **KNOLL:** DESK CHAIR. **OLUCE:** TABLE LAMP. **BROSSIER SADERNE:** CUSTOM SCONES. **DEDAR:** BED FABRIC (BEDROOMS). **HOLLAND & SHERRY:** PANEL FABRIC (FIRST GUEST BEDROOM). **EDEL CARPETS:** CARPET (GUEST BEDROOMS). **RAMY FISCHLER COLLECTION:** NIGHTSTANDS. **MANOOI:** CUSTOM SCONES (GUEST BEDROOMS), CUSTOM CANDELABRA (BATHROOM). **MAKRO:** TUB (BATHROOM). **ALAPE:** SINKS. **DORNBRACHT:** TUB FITTINGS, SINK FITTINGS. **THROUGHOUT J.D. STARON:** CUSTOM RUGS. **TABU:** WOOD VENEER. **THROUGH ZSDRÁL ART POP-UP GALÉRIA:** CERAMICS.



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