

Peerless Property

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Video by Craig Argenti / Photography by Joseph Tiano



See how the talented designers from GHK Design Collaborative transformed a once shuttered factory into a peerless property in Detroit's Milwaukee Junction neighborhood.



The team worked with the Detroit Historic District Commission for a year to restore the façade of the 1920s factory. They recreated the goldleaf Peerless Weighing Machine Company windows on the first floor, complete with their “Watch Your Weight” motto above the entrance, and wood windows were reconstructed to mirror the originals.

INDUSTRIAL ROOTS

After raising their five children, two Washington DC transplants contemplated their next move. They say the decision came without hesitation; they wanted to move back home to Detroit to be a part of the City's revival. Working with General Contractor Kermit Ball of K Custom LLC and long time realtor, Tim Quinn, it didn't take long before they discovered the former Peerless Weighing Machine factory built in the early 1920s.

Located at the northern end of Detroit, Milwaukee Junction received its nickname based on the converging Milwaukee and Grand Trunk Western rail lines, and was the ancestral home to the city's industrial and transportation industries. Carrying everything from Henry Ford's Model Ts which were manufactured three blocks from the couple's home to furniture and even beer from Milwaukee, it played a major role in establishing this neighborhood.



Original inspiration board created by the team for their clients.

NEW LIFE

After the property sat vacant for decades, the couple enlisted the help of *GHK Design Collaborative's* Lauren Guidry, Cynthia Hahn, and Susie Kapadia to convert the historic building into seven apartments on the lower level and the couple's residence on the second floor. The Birmingham-based team were faithful to the homeowner's wishes by sourcing a mix of pieces that are reflective of the period and the history of the building while infusing the design with modern functionality. "Our primary concerns were honoring the soul of the building and showcasing its industrial history as well as bringing it in line with a more modern aesthetic," Kapadia explains.

Original vintage signs and placards are proudly displayed throughout the home, paying homage to the property's former life as the Peerless Weighing Machine Company.



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AVAILABLE AT MDC:
Rita O'Brien Interiors artwork and
accessories, CAI Designs sectional,
Alexandra June accessories.

The large living room host two zones: one for casual television viewing and another more formal area with extra seating.



The homeowner has fond memories of her parents' rollicking parties around this 1922 Steinway piano.

ELEVATED LIVING

The 6,000 square-foot home has a large, open floor plan that is separated into several zones. “Because the living room is so long, it was divided into a cozy TV area and another section that is more of a formal sitting area.” Guidry says. “Because of the large scale of the space, we were able to elevate the living area on a low platform to break up the monotony.”

The custom stained-glass window was constructed by AK Services and is comprised of primarily salvaged glass that was cut to fit the repurposed window frame. “We had to measure every piece of glass to make sure that it would fit the windowpanes,” Kapadia says. “That’s one of the original window frames that came from the building.”

AVAILABLE AT MDC: Alexandra June pillows, CAI Designs sofa.



A homeowner favorite, this two-sided gas fireplace features different peacock tiles on either side and warms the large space.

DOUBLE VISION

“The jumping off point for the fireplace started with the peacock tiles,” Guidry says. Quintessentially Detroit, gorgeous handcrafted Pewabic tiles adorn the double-sided fireplace, with each side being slightly different. The kitchen-facing side has a colorful centerpiece and is framed with an iridescent tile border, while the opposite side is more monochromatic.

The designers also took the white-painted brick back to its historical roots. “Initially, all of the interior brick was painted white” Kapadia explains. “And we were going to distress the paint by roughing it up, but along the way we discovered that it would be a very labor-intensive process, so it was completely stripped out,” Guidry adds.



BEFORE



A stunning linen press was repurposed into a bar and now holds an impressive collection of glass and stemware.

PURPOSFULLY REPURPOSED

Initially rescued from St. Stanislaus Bishop and Martyr Church in Detroit's historic Poletown neighborhood, this linen press was given a new life after more than a decade waiting for the perfect home. Repurposed into a striking bar, it creates a perfect balance in the space and is a terrific conversation piece. Handblown glass pendants were crafted by the homeowner, a talented artist in her own right, offering an intimate ambiance.

AVAILABLE AT MDC: Alexandra June rug.



Linen Press BEFORE



A copper range hood blends seamlessly with the brick color palette while the blue range and tile add a splash of color.



A large island in the center of the kitchen acts as both a gathering space and anchor in the open floor plan.

THE BIG ISLAND

“The key to this space is the big island,” Guidry says. “We wanted it to be big enough for everyone to gather around when they have family or guests over.” At 10 feet in length, it also serves as a cornerstone in the open floor plan. Lighting the island was a challenge. “We had to find fixtures that were not only the right scale, but we had the 15-foot ceilings to contend with,” Guidry notes.

Storage was addressed by taking inventory of the homeowner’s essentials and during a “kitchen storage meeting” with their client, they ascertained how she needed the kitchen to function. “For example, we made sure things that needed to be stored close to the stove like cookie sheets and baking pans had a place,” Kapadia says. The kitchen design includes glass cabinet doors that provide a window to their client’s glass dishware. “She loves glass, so this will show off her pretty glasses.” Kapadia adds.



Young at heart, the couple installed a delightful swing for their grandchildren between the kitchen and dining room.

FUN & WHIMSY

One whimsical feature located in the kitchen/dining area is a swing. Intended for the homeowners' grandchildren, it's become a guilty pleasure for all those who come to visit. "I love the swing; everybody loves the swing," the homeowner says. "She wanted to have a fun space, and she's very young at heart, so an element like that was always a part of the vision," Kapadia says.



The designers created a cozy breakfast nook that has become the homeowners' favorite place to ease into the day with a cup of coffee.



A custom arch was built to frame a collection of meaningful photographs.

HEART OF THE HOME

Aware of how important family is to the couple, the designers suggested creating custom wallpaper to showcase some of the couple's cherished moments. "They have a big family and thousands of photographs, so we thought this would be a great idea to incorporate those memories into a special feature," Guidry explains.

To design the wallpaper, the client hung a full-scale piece of paper at her home in D.C., carefully adding all their family members including grandparents and great grandparents. Pictures include a fifth-grade class photo from her time growing up in Southfield and photos of her sons and grandchildren wearing the same elf suit. She designated a "living" area of the wall where four large pictures representing weddings, holidays, birthdays, and babies can be replaced with new photographs in a frame as time passes. Located off the kitchen, it's genuinely the heart of the home.



Exposed ductwork honors the history of the building while a crystal chandelier gives the primary bedroom a little sparkle without looking out of place.

AVAILABLE AT MDC: Rita O'Brien Interiors artwork and side table, **The Ghiordes Knot** area rug, **Alexandra June** bench and pillow.





Space planning was a major consideration in the primary ensuite bathroom. High on the homeowner's list was a clawfoot tub beneath the window along with a lovely vintage chandelier.

COLLABORATIVE CONSIDERATIONS

“Sometimes people think that architects and interior designers don't need to work in tandem, but it's essential that we collaborate with each other early on in the project,” Kapadia says. “This ensures functional aspects like proper window placement, outlets, and lighting will achieve the highest level of function and aesthetics for the client.” Hahn goes on to say, “This was a fast-moving project, so we needed to get back with D. S. Architects within a week to make any necessary plan changes.”

A half-wall separates the bathroom and a sitting area in the primary bedroom. “Rather than closing off the space with a solid wall, we decided to fashion a cutout wall so that the space is flooded with natural light from the adjacent windows,” Guidry advises.

AVAILABLE AT MDC: Lighting Resource Studio vanity, **Alexandra June** rug, **Beaver Tile and Stone** shower floor tile, **Infusion Showroom by Etna Supply** plumbing fixtures.



The powder room features peacock hues and towel holder along with charming fish swimming on the wall covering.

FISH AND FOWL

The designers personalized the home by highlighting the clients' affinity for fish and peacocks. Varying shades of blue carry throughout the home, from the primary bathroom and the fireplace to this powder room and trim. A lovely French antique semi-flush mount light fixture and vintage-inspired console sink blend seamlessly with modern wallcovering and accents giving the space character.



Designed for the couple's four sons, this guest bathroom adjacent to a future bunkroom has a masculine design with rich wood tones and peacock blues.

BUNKROOM BATHROOM

“The starting points for this bathroom were the trough sink—which is really practical—and the hanging bulb light fixture,” Kapadia explains. “Durability was also a concern. We ran the tile above the mirror to extend the backsplash.” A wise design feature as this guest bathroom, located adjacent to a future bunkroom, will serve the couple's four sons.

AVAILABLE AT MDC: Beaver Tile and Stone shower floor tile, **Lighting Resource Studio** vanity.



The main guest bathroom has a beachy atmosphere and a shower/tub combo to accommodate visiting grandchildren.

FIT FOR A MERMAID (OR MAN)

“The layout in this bathroom was reworked from the original architectural plans so that the window and the view are the main features for the guests,” Guidry says. “We wanted to do something fun with the tile, so we have this pattern that resembles fish scales or a mermaid tail.” The client collects sea glass, and these tones are reflected in the shower tile which is placed in opposite directions to add visual interest. Weathered vanity cabinetry completes the beachy atmosphere. “This is the only bathroom with a shower/tub combo, so it’s easier for their grandchildren,” Kapadia says.

AVAILABLE AT MDC: Beaver Tile and Stone shower tile.



A beloved chair was reupholstered and is one of the homeowner's favorite spots to unwind.

TO DETROIT WITH LOVE

The designers say that it was an honor and a privilege to work with the couple on this project. "When you look at the building and its relationship with this vibrant neighborhood, it's just beautiful," Guidry says. "We really respect the homeowner's dedication to the city and the history of the building," Hahn adds. "They could have found a building that they could tear down and start fresh, but they didn't." "And we couldn't have done it without the help of K Custom and AK Services," Kapadia notes. "They did everything from recreating the windows to the millwork and so many fine details in between."

Since moving in, the homeowners have become quite enmeshed with the neighborhood, quickly becoming regulars at nearby bakeries, coffee shops, and restaurants getting to know the proprietors, even welcoming them into their home. "We love the community," she says. "It's been really nice." Her spouse agrees, "Instead of rebuilding, I like to refer to it as we-building this neighborhood, and we just wanted to be a small part of that."

The couple is thrilled with *GHK Design Collaborative* and their team's work in converting the former factory into a comfortable residence. "At night I sit in the chair that I rocked all my babies, next to my dad's favorite side table, looking at the glowing lights of the Fisher Theater and think, this is pretty perfect."

AVAILABLE AT MDC: Pindler chair fabric.

EXPLORE MORE FROM GHK

Click on the image below to take a peek inside two of the seven ground-level apartments the designers of *GHK Design Collaborative* transformed from the Peerless Weighing Machine abandoned 1920s factory into chic spaces filled with charm and character.

