

luxe BUZZ

A high-rise's modern revival

By DIANE COWEN

The grain of the quartered figured walnut wood almost dances up the wall, from its bottom reveal to its top, one of many modernist touches reintroduced to the newly reimagined The River Oaks high-rise.

Against Alabama limestone's plain canvas and serving as a backdrop to a combination of vintage and new midcentury-style furnishings, that wall paneling is one of many features from the brain trust of Rottet Studio, the renowned interior architecture and design firm based in Houston.

Lauren Rottet's firm was hired by New York-based Arel Capital when the real estate development company bought the Cameron Fairchild-designed building in Houston and decided to restore it rather than demolish it in 2014.

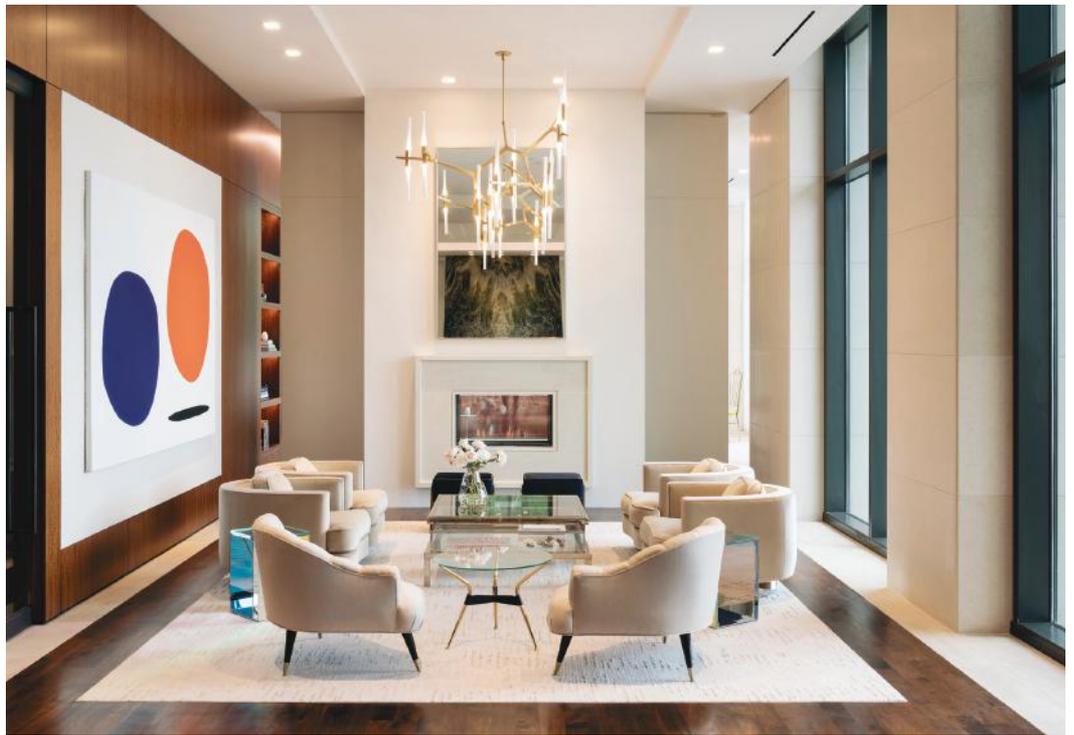
Early on, he hired Rottet for interiors work and soon realized that her influence should touch every aspect of the project, from how interior walls could function, to what the view out every window and door should be. Even what the mailroom should look like.

The building was stripped to its concrete-and-steel bones and completely revamped. Originally designed as a 600-unit apartment building, it now has just 79 units and is nearly 80 percent full. Its earliest residents were moving in by the end of May.

In a recent tour of the newly unveiled building, Rottet explained that her vision was to restore the high-rise to its modernist roots — with a 21st-century mindset.

To achieve both, she asked two questions: What would architects and designers have done when the building went up in the early 1960s, and what would she want it to have if she lived there today?

That made walnut an easy choice for



TOP: IN A LOBBY SEATING AREA, A PAUL KREMER PAINTING LOOMS OVER MID-CENTURY PIECES FROM LYNN GOODE VINTAGE AND CHAIRS BY LAUREN ROTTET. ABOVE: SENIOR ASSOCIATE AMBER LEWIS, LEFT, WITH ROTTET.

the paneling and for the similarly styled built-in bookcases and art niches in the library. It meant interior walls could not touch perimeter walls and reveals — that gap between wall and floor that in traditional homes are covered by baseboards — were essential.

Lighting is all modern, gleaming in golds, silvers and bronzes. Mixed metals wouldn't necessarily be a '60s-era touch, but Rottet and her senior associate Amber

Lewis blend them effortlessly.

In the lobby, slabs of dramatic stone are paired on a wall for a butterflylike pattern and then bookmatched on top of a silvery-nickel, ribbed-front counter with a reveal that shines light from the structure's bottom. An homage to Mies van der Rohe, one of modernism's founding fathers, nods Rottet.

Nearby are back-to-back lobby and library, spaces separated by doors that

RIGHT:
ELVIS, A
FRENCH
BULLDOG,
WAITS HIS
TURN AT
IN THE ON-
SITE DOG
BATH.

Gary Fountain



TOP: AN ADJUSTABLE GREEN VELVET COUCH IN THE BACK LOBBY SHARES SPACE WITH AN ABSTRACT PAINTING BY GAEL STACK. ABOVE: THE RIVER OAKS' AMENITIES FLOOR FEATURES COMFORTABLE SEATING.



hinge at the ceiling and floor and a fireplace that allows you to see through the building's west windows to St. Luke's United Methodist Church next door, an architectural contrast with its traditional steeple, ornamental masonry and classic columns.

The River Oaks' spaces are filled with furniture that Rottet and Lewis chose themselves, much of it sourced in Houston, at Lynn Goode Vintage, Reeves



A RIBBED-FRONT CABINET JOINS MID-CENTURY-STYLE CHAIRS IN A READING NOOK.

Antiques and other stores. Millwork was handled by Brochstein's, the Houston firm that provides luxury millwork in homes and businesses all over the world.

Some of it is Rottet Studio's own furniture — a leather bench, Cubist Curve lounge chairs, her Cross Bar cocktail table restyled into a rectangle, a long leather bench, and her award-winning Dichroic table, which reflects light and color and looks different at every angle.

Colorful art by contemporary and modern artists Alex Katz, Paul Kremer, Gael Stack, Stanley Whitney, Shaun O'Dell, Manual (Ed Hill and Suzanne Bloom), Anton Ginzberg and others greets you in every public space, all chosen by Lea Weingarten of the Weingarten Art Group.

What might most impress the building's residents is its mailroom, for its unexpected comfort and beauty. Tall banks of wooden cabinets holding individual mail slots are topped with round mirrors. In the center of the cluster sits a plush velvet curvy sofa and two green velvet swivel chairs, in case you want to open your mail and see who wanders through.

"Amber and I wanted an amazing mailroom because we thought that if we lived here, it would be super fun. Instead of walking down a long, dark hall to get your mail — there isn't any more good mail, right? It's not like in the old days when you got a letter from your mom or she sent you some cookies — we thought we would have a nice fun mailroom," Rottet said. "You can say 'Hi' to your neighbor or just get your mail and go."