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Bachelor Pad? Sure. Just Don't Call This Designer's Work a Man Cave

Lauren Svenstrup breaks down her approach to designing practical yet sophisticated spaces for men

By Alina Dizik

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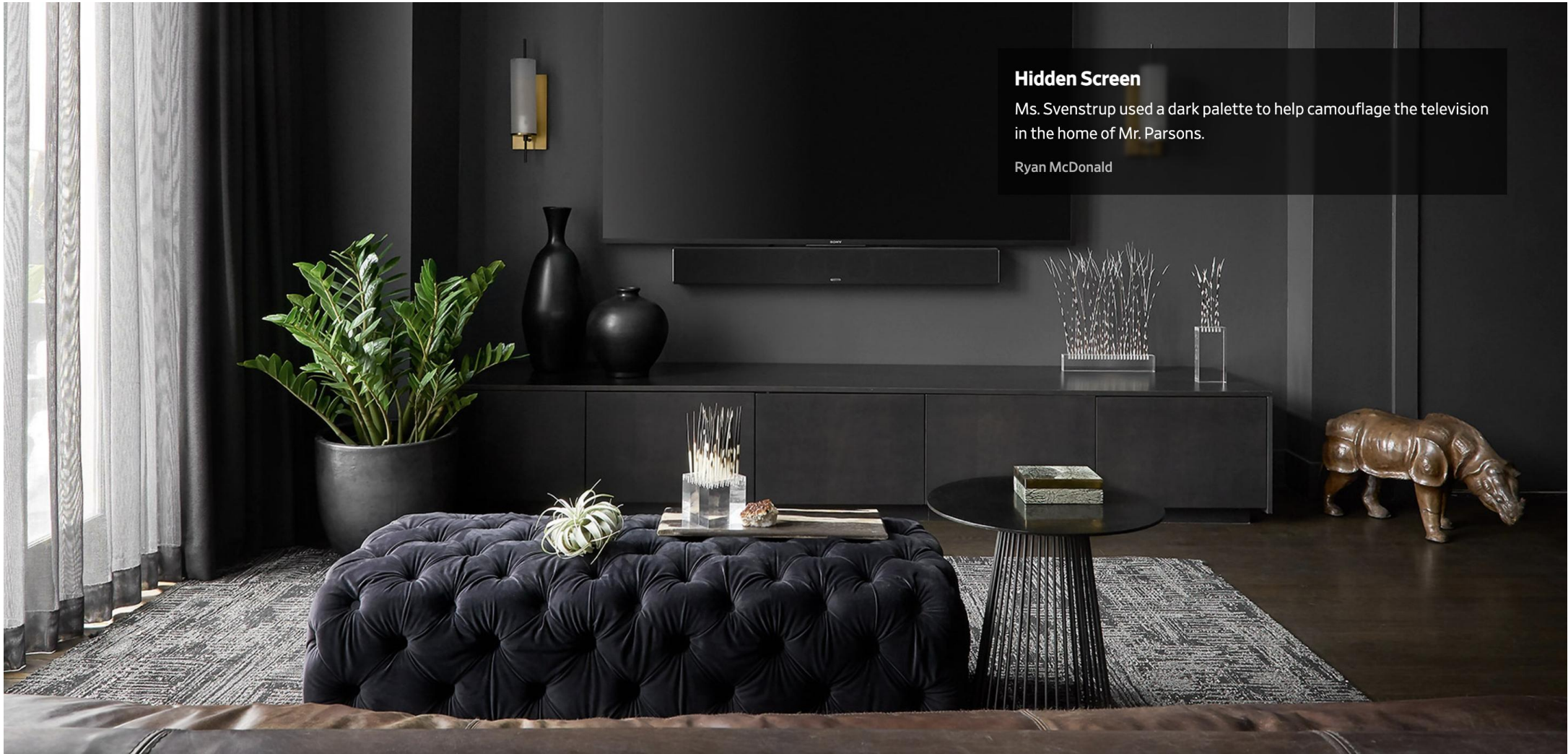
When designing a bachelor pad, one designer likens her hassle-free approach to that of a concierge.

The goal is to move swiftly through the process without inundating clients with choices about backsplashes or wall colors, says Chicago-based interior designer Lauren Svenstrup, who does the heavy lifting out of sight. “You’re really curating this lifestyle and experience for them,” she says. “They are not the people who want to know individual nickels and dimes.”

Bachelor clients want to show off their personality without compromising on sophisticated decor, says Ms. Svenstrup who founded Studio Sven in 2014. She is known for her dramatic one-of-kind living spaces, such as black kitchens, and has designed a handful of bachelor homes in the past few years. “We are trying to refine their passions,” she says. “You don’t walk into someone’s home and think it’s a man cave.”

Behind the scenes, she spends hours brushing up on their serious hobbies to understand how to present them inside the home. Recently, that has included college football, whiskey, breweries, mountain climbing and even Legos. She avoids back-and-forth conversations to avoid overwhelming her clients with details. Instead, she presents them with one cohesive design.

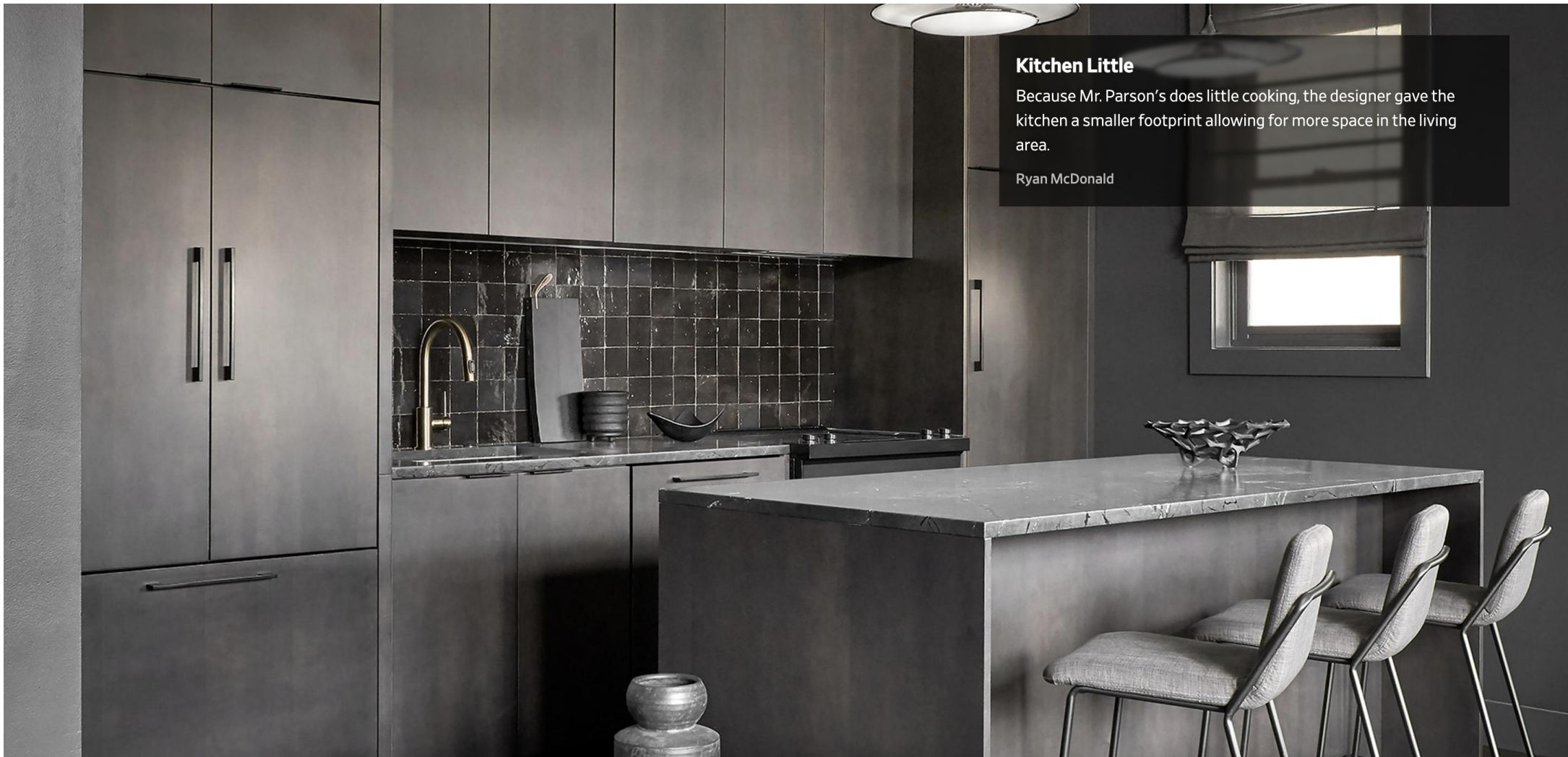
In the Chicago home of Jeffrey Parsons, Ms. Svenstrup had to think about how to camouflage an 80-inch television in the living room that was too wide to hang over a smaller fireplace. Instead of asking him to return it, Ms. Svenstrup, who studied furniture design, demolished the existing fireplace to create a long linear console. She painted the walls a near-black color to help the television blend in with the wall in his two-bedroom, two-bath walk-up near Wrigley Field.



Hidden Screen

Ms. Svenstrup used a dark palette to help camouflage the television in the home of Mr. Parsons.

Ryan McDonald



Kitchen Little

Because Mr. Parson's does little cooking, the designer gave the kitchen a smaller footprint allowing for more space in the living area.

Ryan McDonald



No Frills

The bathroom in Mr. Parsons home has wood and marble to create a masculine feel.

Ryan McDonald

She also went against common practice when tailoring the kitchen to her client's needs. After learning that Mr. Parsons wasn't a frequent cook, she created a smaller footprint for the kitchen and added a pantry that includes his more frequently used appliances, including a microwave and coffee maker. The black marble counter and gray cabinets combine with the living space rather than draw attention to the area. "It's one open space and we didn't want the kitchen to be the focal point," she says.

Mr. Parsons, whose home was completed in 2016, adds that working with a designer has helped him realize he likes a home that is "crisp and modern."

To highlight must-have knickknacks, Ms. Svenstrup uses private nooks. In Mr. Parson's hallway, she created a gallery wall with shadowboxes that hold buttons, newspaper clippings and tickets from the Iowa Hawkeyes football team that date to the 1950s.

“When she came in, it looked like a nice frat house,” says Mr. Parsons, a 53-year-old leadership consultant who has held season tickets to the Hawkeyes for the past 30 years. “Now it’s this incredible elegant modern space, but still captures this passion I have for Iowa.”

The Right Stuff



In Mr. Pancoe's downtown condo, Ms. Svenstrup combined traditionally masculine materials, such as animal hides and leather, with dark walls. PHOTOS: RYAN MCDONALD(3)

Seating is often the most difficult decision for her clients. Ms. Svenstrup schedules appointments to visit showrooms and furniture stores with them in tow see in person the most important furniture pieces. “My client wants to be able to sit in a sofa before he buys it,” she says.

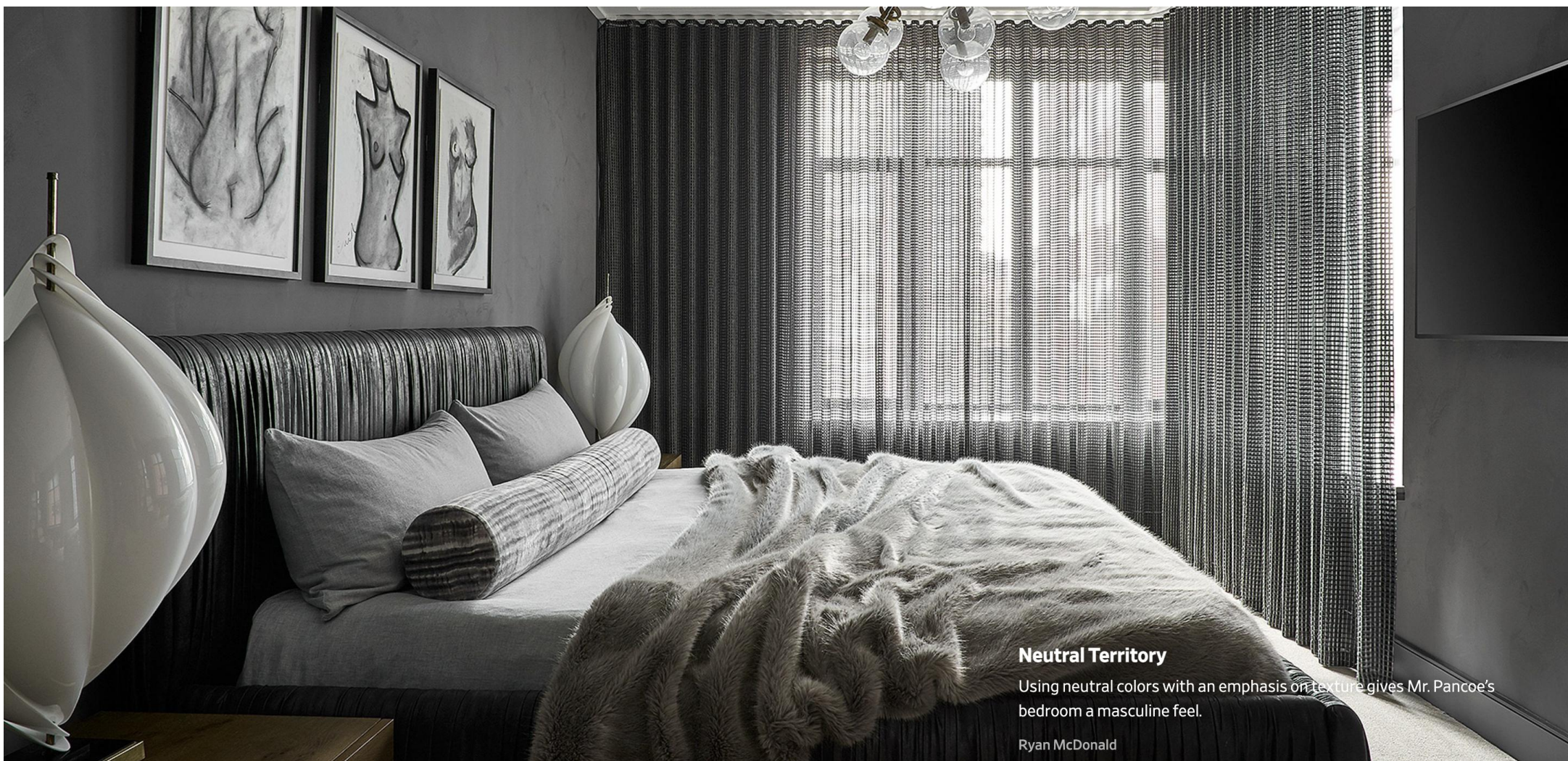
For another bachelor client, Ms. Svenstrup chose to weave his love of mountaineering throughout the interior. She included an oversize art piece of mountaineer Corey Richards after an avalanche, and custom wallpaper on the ceiling with abstract brush strokes in the form of the mountains he climbed around the world. “I wanted to quietly nod to his passions,” she says of client Alexander Pancoe. “You don’t need a literal mountain to show that you are a mountain climber.” The hallway uses purple lacquer in homage to his alma mater, Northwestern University.



Mountain View

Ms. Svenstrup designed Alexander Pancoe's one-bedroom Chicago condo to reflect his love of mountain climbing.

Ryan McDonald



Neutral Territory

Using neutral colors with an emphasis on texture gives Mr. Pancoe's bedroom a masculine feel.

Ryan McDonald

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Ms. Svenstrup sometimes designs with an eye toward dating. To make the 34-year-old financial adviser's home more "comfortable and inviting" for a female visitor, she worked with a home organizer, who helped fill the kitchen cabinets with essentials, including quality kitchen towels, a corkscrew and wine glasses.

She added bathroom built-ins to store the toilet paper he had previously kept in the kitchen. She recalls telling him that some adjustments had to be made if someone else would be there opening the cabinets.

Mr. Pancoe, says it is worked out, though not as he expected. He is now engaged and living in a nearby two-bedroom with two dogs. His bachelor pad is a rental for now, but he hopes to turn it into an in-town apartment for his own use once he leaves downtown. In any event, he adds, "She allowed my home to tell a story."

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