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UPTOWN SPUNK

HOW DO YOU BRING AN UPPER EAST SIDE PREWAR INTO THE MODERN AGE? DESIGNER **DAVID NETTO** SHARES HIS RECIPE FOR SUCCESS.

BY **DAVID NETTO**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **FRANCESCO LAGNESE**

In the gallery of an apartment on New York's Upper East Side that was designed by David Netto and the architect Gil P. Schafer, the custom console by Christopher Hodsoll is framed by a pair of mahogany Regency chairs and topped with lamps by Blackman Cruz and an artwork (*left*) by LeRoy Grannis. The mirror is by RH Modern, the ceiling fixture is by the Urban Electric Co., and the sconce is by Christian Liaigre. The wallpaper is by Pierre Frey, the custom runner is by Holland & Sherry, and the wall artworks are by Dewey Nicks (*top left*), Ralph Gibson (*bottom left*), and Rene Ricard (*right*).

MANY OF US HAVE A FAVORITE BUILDING ON New York's Upper East Side—whether our reasons are based on aesthetics, history, or looking up while strolling and wishing we might one day live there ourselves. When I was about 10, my pick was a handsome Georgian building on Lexington in the high 60s. A classmate's family lived in a magnificent apartment there, haphazardly furnished, with a fireplace in the empty front hall. I first saw it when we were turned away from a matinee of *The Jerk* (rated R) and went to his house to pretend to skateboard, sliding around on the parquet.

Cut to nearly four decades later and I am a grown-up decorator—who can get into any movie he wants—designing an apartment in this very same building. My collaborator is a longtime friend, the architect Gil P. Schafer, who is a master of sure-footed, elegant American classicism. I met Gil early in my career, and while we have worked together before, this was our first team project in an urban context.

It's all very nice for architects and designers to stand for something, but the clients are the characters driving the story. The narrative here is charming: A husband and wife, their children grown and gone, plan to trade their apartment of almost 30 years for a loft, then realize they are too much in love with their

ABOVE: In the living room the sofa, in a Holland & Sherry linen horsehair, and the cocktail table are by Liz O'Brien Editions. The Louis XV chair from Gerald Bland is in a Jasper leather, the cane Marcel Breuer chair is from Bauhaus 2 Your House, and the tall bookcase is one of a pair designed by Albert Hadley. The dining table is by Rove Concepts, the table lamp is by Gregorius Pineo, and the painting is by Richard Serra. **OPPOSITE:** The hallway's wallpaper is by Studio Printworks, the jute carpet is by Beauvais Carpets, and the custom lacquered ceiling depicts the night sky. The diamond painting is by Kurt Pio.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: The Eileen Gray chair in the den is from Ecart International, the wallcovering is by Nobilis, and the artworks are by Hugo Guinness (*top*) and Paddy Farrell. The living room's table lamps are by Jacques Adnet (*left*) and Gregorius Pineo, and the floor lamp is by Cedric Hartman. In the kitchen, the oven and hood are by Wolf, and the custom cabinetry has E.R. Butler & Co. hardware; the clock is from the MoMA Design Store. In the master bath, the custom Urban Archaeology vanity has Lefroy Brooks fittings; the flooring is Paonazzo marble from BAS Stone, and the walls are in Benjamin Moore's Dove Wing.

neighborhood to leave. That's when Gil and I got their call and were tasked with reviving their familiar uptown surroundings with a touch of downtown edge.

Our first line of attack was to reinvent the apartment's layout. The old plan ticked all the boxes—generous entrance gallery, fireplace in the living room. But it also had all the usual problems that you find in a 1920s apartment whose original occupants were accustomed to summoning their live-in staff by ringing a dinner bell. The kitchen was isolated. The relationship between the gallery and living room was about hierarchy and separation, not relaxation and flow. All of the bedrooms were the same size—and none of them were big enough to deliver any sense of decadence in the master.

I have watched over the years as half-height bookcases have transformed one spacious but bourgeois Park Avenue apartment after another into airy, expansive masterpieces (note Grace Dudley's place at 550 Park Avenue and Oscar de la Renta's at 660 Park Avenue). We used this device here but reintroduced pairs of doors—in French-polished mahogany, no less—to invoke a little of the formality one expects in a classic building.

Color: Go in strong if you go at all. These clients were not afraid of bold hues, and we needed them to energize the deepest parts of the apartment, where there was little natural light. Pierre Frey made us the brown jungly wallpaper for the gallery (a kind of New York take on the banana-leaf pattern at the Beverly Hills Hotel). The kitchen is certainly as dramatic as anything that Gil or I have ever done. This is because we didn't do it—the homeowner did, and we helped her to achieve her dreams. I may have suggested dark lacquer, but she and my studio director, Lily Dierkes, came up with that very rich blue and the surprising colors of the linoleum floor.

ABOVE: The master bedroom's custom bed is upholstered in a Sahco fabric and dressed with linens by Schweitzer Linen. The Mecox nightstands are topped with Collier Webb lamps, the Hans Wegner stools for Carl Hansen are from Design Within Reach, the side table is by Lawson-Fenning, and the curtains, wallcovering, and screen are of a Sahco fabric. **LEFT:** In the guest bath, the fittings on the St. Thomas Creations sink and in the shower are by Newport Brass, the medicine cabinet is by RH, Restoration Hardware, and the shower tile is by Daltile. The room is painted in Benjamin Moore's Deep Royal.

What happens to great New York style? How does it move forward? If Gil Schafer doesn't know, then nobody does. As he explains, the goal with this project was to return the apartment to its good classical bones while thinking about them in a fresh way. "The most interesting conversation can be between opposite points of view," Gil says, "as long as both sides are listening and understanding."

After all those hours spent listening and planning, a real friendship developed. I still call this couple all the time to tell them a joke or talk about our children or insist that the wife watch *Succession* because Cherry Jones and the entire Pierce clan are clearly based on her family. We have even traveled together to Nantucket and Mexico City, laughing for days. Being a good decorator is not a job with a lot of boundaries, but I've learned that in order to do your best work, you have to care so much, you wouldn't dream of letting your client down. ■

The living room's Pierre Paulin chairs are from Artifort, the Hervé van der Straeten mirror is from Maison Gerard, and the raffia rug is by F.J. Hakimian. The custom Regency-style mantel is by Jamb, and the mahogany door was made by Laszlo Sallay. For details, see Resources.