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ABOVE THE FRAY

FOR A GRACIOUS APARTMENT WITH TREETOP VIEWS, DESIGNER ALEX PAPACHRISTIDIS CONCEIVES ROOMS
TEXT BY GREGORY CERIO · PHOTOGRAPHY BY HENRY BOURNE · STYLED BY LILI ABIR REGEN



The living room of Michael Field and Jeff Arnstein's Manhattan apartment, which was decorated by Alex Papachristidis, features a 1940s Italian desk and a Metamorphosis pendant light by Denis Collura from Niedermaier; the painting above the fireplace is by Cynthia Knott. The Axel Einar Hjorth inlaid chest is from the '20s, and the Tibetan carpet was custom made by Doris Leslie Blau. See Resources.

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ots of people, as Eva Gabor memorably sang in the theme song to the 1960s sitcom *Green Acres*, "just adore a penthouse view." But when Michael Field and Jeff Arnstein were looking at apartments in a handsome turn-of-the-century building on New York's Central Park West, they passed on one with a sweeping master-of-all-I-survey vista for a unit on a lower floor where the windows overlook the greenery at treetop level. "It makes the park feel more like a part of our home," says Arnstein, the finance director of Friends of the High Line, a local landmark-redevelopment project. "From this height, you can really appreciate the change of seasons." Field, a real-estate developer and investor, adds, "The light is different at this level, it's softer. You feel like you live in a more human-scaled city, like London or Paris."

The couple's sensitive concern for the ambience of living space informs their refined home, which bridges the classic and the comfortable. "We wanted a place where a structured, formal shell would embrace a warm interior," Field says. To realize this vision, he and Arnstein turned to decorator Alex Papachristidis, a friend of Field's since childhood. "Alex designs by instinct," Field says. "He conjures environments that meld different schemes and offer surprises that are fun rather than dissonant."

First, however, came the shell. The apartment's layout contained cramped private rooms built around a central corridor, and there was little space for storage. A new floor plan by architectural firm Fairfax & Sammons widened some living areas and turned others into closets. To achieve the traditional envelope Field and Arnstein craved, they also installed ennobling details like neoclassical moldings and wainscot. In what became the combination dining room and library ("I



Papachristidis designed the love seat, and the vintage cocktail table is from Bernice Goeckler Antiques. Facing page, clockwise from top left: A 1940s brass mirror and vintage Swedish commode from H. M. L. Ther in the foyer. The carpet in the study is from Beauvais. The living room's cocktail table was custom made by Frederick P. Victoria & Son, and the '40s armoire was found at a Paris flea market. See Resource



hate underused rooms," Papachristidis says), exposed structural beams formed the basis of a Roman-inspired coffered ceiling. In addition to the requisite dining furnishings—in this case, a walnut Paul McCobb table surrounded by six midcentury Danish rosewood chairs—the decorator put in a marble fireplace surround, a painted mantel and bookshelves, and a pair of tufted mohair settees for reading.

A moody wall covering resembling horsehair gives the room a clubby feel, and a dramatic abstract by artist Ryan McGinness adds a bright contemporary note. One of the most charming details is also one of the simplest: Papachristidis placed a small, square table for two next to the window facing the park. Arnstein and Field have different daily schedules, but the table affords a great spot for morning coffee, reading the newspaper, and watching the city come alive. Says Arnstein: "It makes for one of the best moments of the day."

Relations between decorators and their clients can be equal parts chummy and combative. This one, however, was pleasantly collaborative. "Everyone brought ideas to the table, and we discussed them until we came to an agreement," Field says. The three took shopping trips to the Paris flea markets and pored over furniture and accessories together. When Papachristidis orchestrated an elegant living room that combines French-modern furnishings with midcentury accent pieces and Arnstein feared it would be too much of a showpiece, they decided to install a TV—hidden in a '20s



In the dining room/library, a pair of sofas designed by Papachristidis, a Paul McCobb dining table, and midcentury Danish rosewood chairs; *The Ownership Dilemma*, displayed over the mantel, is by Ryan McGinness. Facing page, from left: The kitchen's custom-made light fixtures are from Ann-Morris Antique and the range is by Wolf. A Jasper Johns lithograph presides over the master bedroom; the mohair throw is by Hermès, and the faux bois wallpaper is by Nobilis. See Resource





“ALEX DESIGNS BY INSTINCT,” FIELD SAYS. “HE CONJURES ENVIRONMENTS THAT MELD DIFFERENT SCHEMES AND OFFER FUN SURPRISES”

Swedish cabinet with striking inlays—where Arnstein watches the nightly news.

But occasionally clients simply bow to the wishes of the designer and hope for the best. Papachristidis's proposal for stenciling the entrance hall's parquet floor with a pattern of circles and squares was one “I just couldn't envision,” Arnstein admits. “I kept picturing something from a '70s game-show set.” Papachristidis prevailed on him to give it a try, and Arnstein is thrilled with the results. “I'm glad I trusted his eye,” he says. “Alex really pushes us beyond our boundaries.”

Papachristidis also created separate home offices and two bathrooms that he lavished with veined white marble, nickel fittings, and multiple mirrors to “befit the era of the building,” the decorator says. Arnstein was keen to have a guest room, an amenity lacking in

their previous apartment. “I grew up in Wisconsin and lived in California for a while,” he says, “so I wanted a place where friends and family could stay.” Papachristidis carved out a sleeping alcove in Arnstein's study with a pasha-worthy trove of cushions and bolsters covering the sumptuous queen-size banquette.

Meanwhile, the master bedroom, at the back of the apartment, gets little natural light, but the decorator turned that to his favor by playing up the coziness. He covered the windows in full-length curtains, upholstered a bench and bed in chocolate suede and linen, respectively, and sheathed the space in wallpaper that resembles limed wood. There are some jazzy details—such as a ceiling light fixture studded with glass rods—but the overall feel is of a luxurious cabin in the forest. What could be more fitting for a peaceful night's rest among the treetops? ■