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MODERN RENAISSANCE

FALL 2022
ISSUE N° 27



A Charles Gaines painting and a figurative sculpture by Thomas Houseago join a wall-spanning work by John Armleder at one end of the living and dining space created by architect Lee F. Mindel in his redesign of an Upper East Side apartment. Sofas and armchairs by SheltonMindel are grouped with a Poul Kjærholm daybed around a custom-made cocktail table by Germans Ermičs and Boris Berlin that hosts a Yamaguchi Ryuun woven vessel. The glass and metal end table is a Charlotte Perriand prototype, and the twin side tables are by André Arbus. For details see Sources.

Robust Refresh

Two decades after renovating a family's Manhattan apartment, architect Lee F. Mindel undertakes a dramatic reinvention spurred by their ever-expanding collection of adventurous art

*By Vicky Lowery
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Styled by Lili Abir Regen*





t some point in our lives, all of us crave an “adult” home: a beautifully furnished, thoughtfully organized space that reflects our evolved tastes and more sophisticated style. For one New York couple, the urge to upgrade wasn’t just about reaching the empty-nester stage but also needing rooms better tailored for displaying art—lots of it. “Our collection had grown, our three kids were out of the house, and we both liked working from home,” explains the wife, who is a filmmaker. “We wanted a grown-up apartment.”

To be clear, it wasn’t as though the couple had been living with college-dorm decor. Two decades ago, when they purchased their five-bedroom prewar Upper East Side residence, they turned to the architecture and design firm SheltonMindel for a down-to-the-studs renovation, which included a glassed-in entry vestibule, separate dining and living rooms, and ample built-in shelves to hold their books and collectibles. Working soon after 9/11, when a desire to feel protected was paramount, the firm’s principal, Lee F. Mindel, paneled most of the rooms in warm anigre wood to create a sense of a welcoming retreat.

Three years ago the couple once again commissioned Mindel to reimagine the interiors, this time aiming for an airy, soigné vibe, all the better for entertaining and displaying their adventurous contemporary art. “I wanted everything white and calm for →



In the entrance hall, a mirror by Chen Chen & Kai Williams, a John Hogan glass vessel, and a gold-tone metal table by Ma Yansong cast captivating reflections and plays of light; the large painting is by Rashid Johnson, the mixed-media sculpture is by Matthew Monahan, and Markus Amm painted the small work. OPPOSITE: At the center of the entertaining space, a pair of SheltonMindel-designed dining tables is surrounded by Autoban chairs from the Future Perfect. A Fred Eversley sculpture in the window at the room's far end is flanked by Lesley Vance and Rita Ackermann paintings, while a Jos Devriendt floor lamp stands nearby.



Anchoring the wife's office is a desk by Max Lamb, who also made the chair in front. The high-back slipper chair behind is a 1920s Uno Åhrén design. A Jayson Musson text piece and a work by Beth Campbell are mounted between the windows, and a Woody De Othello ceramic phone sculpture is displayed above an Alex Jackson watercolor. The custom-made rug is by Fort Street Studio.



“Our collection had grown, our three kids were out of the house, and we both liked working from home,” says the wife. “We wanted a grown-up apartment”



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: In one of the bedrooms, Mindel repainted the cabinetry in a sunny Benjamin Moore shade and reupholstered both the sofa and the bed, which is dressed with Matouk linens; the neon artwork is by Rachel Lee Hovnanian, and the text work is by Scott Patt. A Tala Madani painting overlooks the family room’s bespoke SheltonMindel sectional sofa; the artwork between the windows is by Matthew Monahan, the floor lamp is vintage Tobia Scarpa, and the Haas Brothers conceived the stool. Misha Kahn created a powder room’s mirror and low table.

“I always say, ‘Let the art and the guests provide the color,’” notes the wife

the living areas,” recalls the wife, a prolific collector of ceramics, sculptures, and large-scale paintings. “I always say, ‘Let the art and the guests provide the color.’”

Mindel removed the many built-in shelves that had obstructed the hanging of art, eliminated one of the two hallways, and tucked additional storage space behind millwork. He crafted a sleek oak-lined banquette dining nook in the kitchen—an homage, according to the history-minded architect, to Edward Hopper’s famous diner painting, *Nighthawks*. He removed the walls entirely between the living and dining rooms to form a single, free-flowing space. Now distinct sitting areas at either end flank a dining area with two large custom-made tables on gliders, allowing them to be pushed together or separated. “During the day it can serve as a WeWork,” the wife says with a laugh, “and at night I can seat 20 for dinner.”

“People generally don’t use their living rooms and don’t use their dining rooms,” says Mindel. “Here, they use everything. The apartment is like a boat, because every bit of space is utilized.” Working with his interiors colleague

Grace V. Sierra, Mindel updated the mix of furnishings, repurposing select pieces like the husband’s favorite chair, a 1955 Hans Wegner prototype, which they paired with a ’60s Serge Mouille table and a rare 1939 Märta Blomstedt sheepskin armchair and ottoman in one of the room’s seating areas.

Mindel also deepened window bays in a nod to prewar elegance and replaced the more typical crown molding with recessed paneling to do away with any visual distractions to the art. Presiding over one end of the living-dining space is a monumental four-panel work by John Armleder featuring chromatic striations he creates by pouring paint colors onto a tilted canvas. Nearby stands a figurative sculpture by Thomas

Houseago crafted from plaster and hemp and too fragile to move during the renovation—when it was originally installed, an elbow broke, yet the piece doesn’t look worse for the wear. Hanging at the room’s opposite end is a vibrant abstract painting by Gerhard Richter bought in 1999, when the couple started to get serious about collecting. “It was more than we’d spent on anything other than our apartment,” the wife recalls, “but someone once told me, ‘Buy the best you can buy and

trust yourself. Buy with your eyes.’” A series of bronze figurines by William Kentridge situated above the fireplace, meanwhile, reminded them of Indonesian gamelan puppets they’d seen while living in Southeast Asia in the ’90s.

Elsewhere, Mindel refreshed the primary bedroom, using soothing hues of nude and pale pink to heighten the seductive effect of a vintage sculptural chaise longue by Hans Hartl, a colorful resin chair by Gaetano Pesce, and mesmerizing artworks by Charline von Heyl, Olafur Eliasson, and Rita Ackermann. He also fashioned a pair of art-filled home offices (in shades of pink for the wife, blue for her husband), and outfitted a powder room with a flamboyant blue Misha Kahn balloon mirror and walls to



match. And because this is a grown-up apartment, after all, Mindel reconceived the dressing room with enough concealed storage for an abundance of high heels as well as a proper laundry room, filling this space, too, with art.

It’s a deeply personal collection, assembled not by browsing online or bidding at auction but through the abiding curiosity of a couple who routinely tours galleries and visits artists’ studios—always with an eye out for budding talent. “When we moved back to New York City I wanted to learn more about the art scene here, and a friend who was a mentor told me, ‘Your life is going to be more interesting if you get to know artists and live with art,’” the wife recalls. Consider it advice well taken. □

The gridded structure of an Olafur Eliasson spherical light echoes a Charline von Heyl painting hung next to a vintage Hans Hartl chaise longue in the primary bedroom. The cylindrical floor lamp is by Office Kersten Geers David Van Severen with artist Pieter Vermeersch, and the table lamp is by Jos Devriendt. OPPOSITE: A Gaetano Pesce chair perches near the bedroom's fireplace, while an Arlene Shechet sculpture joins a Markus Amm painting next to the window.

