

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

February 2002

Upper West Side Duplex, New York, NY

# Home Is Where the Art Is

MERGING TWO APARTMENTS FOR FAMILY LIFE AND GALLERY SPACE



**T**he dark-haired lady of the house was getting ready to host her first birthday party in a new duplex. She was setting out a plate of petits fours so exquisitely iced with bows and flowers they resembled a display of Meissen snuffboxes. Otherwise, there was nothing frilly or old-fashioned in sight—certainly not the lady in her stylishly severe black suit and Lulu bob. The apartment was still “a work in progress,” she explained, and while a housekeeper vacuumed up the plaster dust, a workman prepped the underside of a curvaceously modern wood-and-glass staircase to receive a coat of cobalt lacquer—the hue of a trapezoidal mirror over the fireplace and of a 1930s-style chest near it.

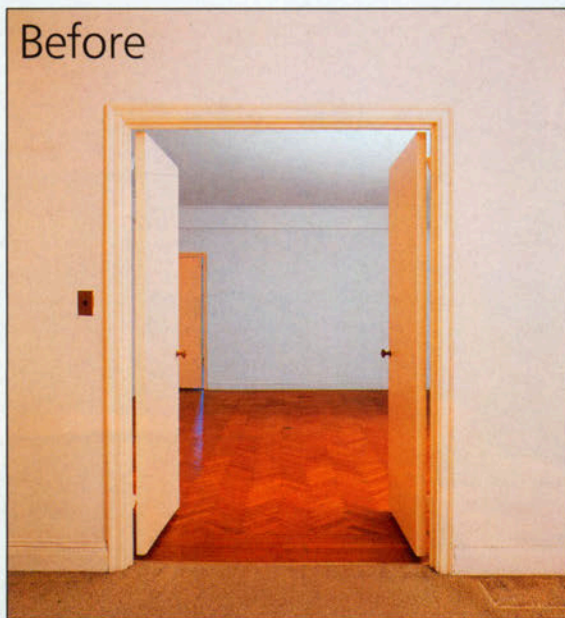
“I hope it works,” she sighed, a little worried that the jolt of blue might be too electric in a loftlike space already glowing with art-glass colors: chairs upholstered in ruby mohair and acid-green velvet; boldly graphic checkerboard sofas; translucent doors framed in

dark oak; and big, figurative contemporary paintings, one of them a likeness of Mia Farrow in her most famous role, frowning at Rosemary’s devil-baby. “On the other hand,” she reflected, “I didn’t want a mousy-beige apartment. Taking risks was the point.”

The point was also to double the square footage of her family’s seven-room apartment in an Art Déco landmark facing Central Park. Her own philanthropic work in arts education had outgrown a cramped home office, and the couple’s two teenagers were getting more independent and needed “breathing space.” So did their fine collection of contemporary art and early-20th-century drawings. “My husband does the acquisition, and I curate,” she says, “which really means I hang the pictures and try to stuff what doesn’t fit into a closet.”

Phase one was negotiating to buy and break through to the floor below: a “time capsule” of musty nooks that had belonged to the widow of a Viennese psychoanalyst. (With apologies to Freud, there’s no real mystery about what women want—more room for shoes.) At first the husband vehemently resisted the “hassle” of moving out of, then gutting, his beloved homestead. But as is often the case, the motivated spouse carried the day.

A friend recommended to them the young, highly regarded New York architect Alexander Gorlin, who specializes in giving historically significant buildings and interiors a sensuously modern new identity. “This project was like an intricate Chinese puzzle,” Gorlin observes, “a double stack of boxy parlors hogging the light and a dark labyrinth of rear bedrooms.” His solu-



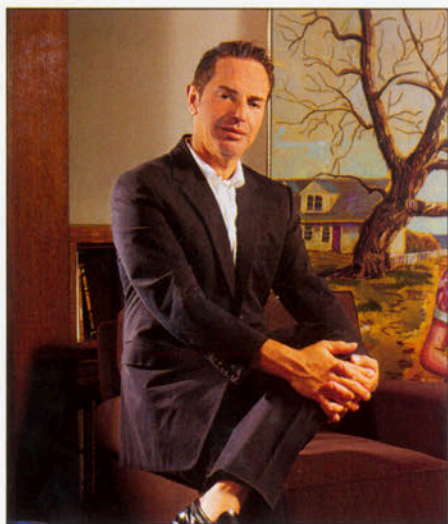
“We opened up and brought light into its dark, small rooms,” architect Alexander Gorlin (above left) says of his clients’ Art Déco duplex in Manhattan. **LEFT:** The entrance hall. **OPPOSITE:** “The new staircase unites the floors; its curves contrast with the rectangularity of the spaces.” Lee Jofa fabric on J. Robert Scott chairs.

Architecture by Alexander Gorlin, AIA/Interior Design by John Barman, ASID

Text by Judith Thurman/Before Photography by Billy Cunningham/After Photography by Durston Saylor

After





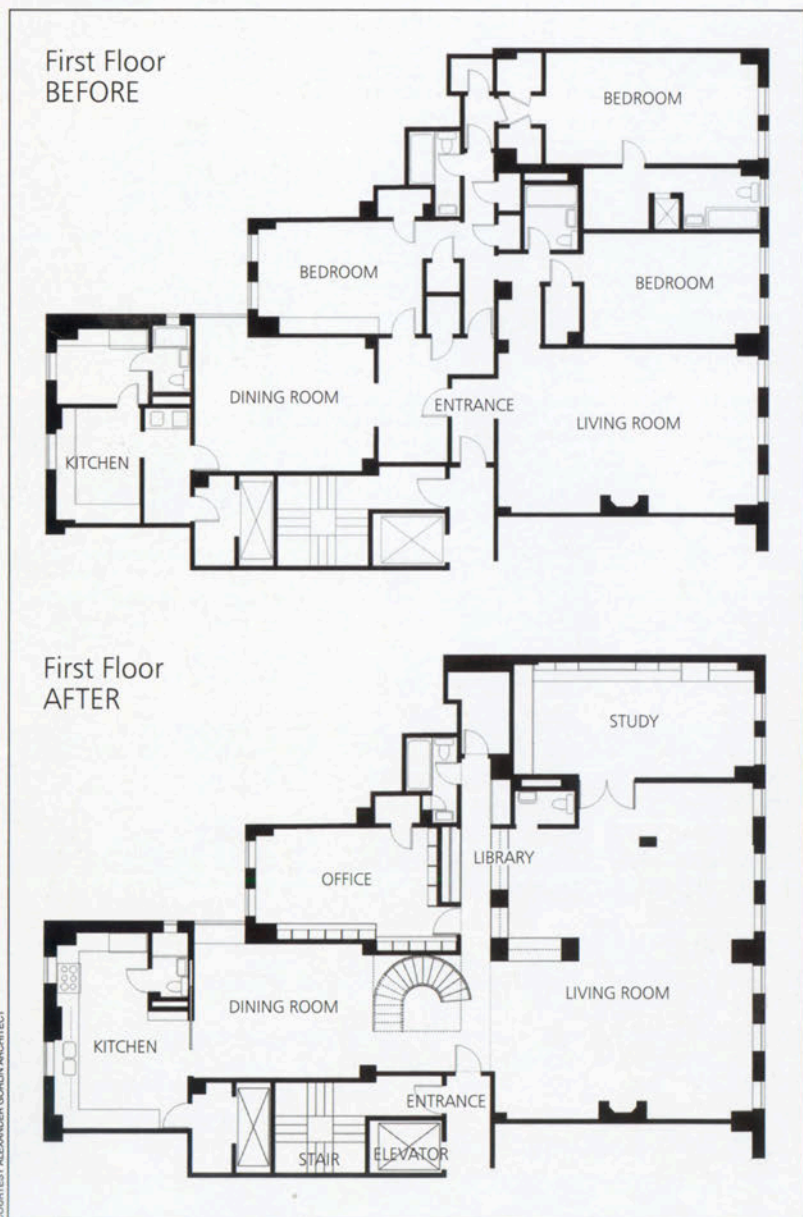
"We wanted to use exciting colors that complement the art," says designer John Barman (above), who worked with his associate, Kelly Graham.

tion was to break the bones of the spatial skeleton in order to realign them, "blasting through" from front to back on the lower floor to let the light in, and to unfold a theatrically open living and dining area with plenty of gallery space for the couple's art.

On the upper level, he created a family wing that preserved the intimacy of their old layout but made its proportions more orderly and luxurious. "Now, wherever you look," Gorlin says with satisfaction, "there's an interesting revelation of the view. The glass-and-oak staircase functions as a fulcrum between the communal and private spaces and unites the two floors. The wife

wanted the apartment to read as a glamorous duplex, the husband for it to function as a cozy house, and it does both. I think it's a good marriage of her playfulness to his urbanity. He comes from a patrician family who have, for generations, been patrons of architecture in northern Europe." "It's true," adds the wife. "I'm the designated bohemian. My

BELOW LEFT: The plans show how the rooms on the first floor were reconfigured and enlarged. OPPOSITE LEFT AND RIGHT: Several walls were knocked down to create an expansive, loftlike living room. BELOW: *White Hat* by Susan Hall hangs near the Steinway & Sons grand piano.



Before



In Progress



Before



LEFT: The living room had metal-and-wood shelves. BELOW: *Second Nature*, left, and *Love and Rainwater* by Duncan Hannah flank the fireplace. Lee Jofa green velvet and gold silk. Red mohair from Donghia. Karl Kemp & Assoc. torchère and Art Déco chair, foreground.

OPPOSITE: Gorlin broke through the floor of the original dining room (right) to provide space for the glass-and-oak staircase. "The art takes center stage in the hall," notes Barman. Thomas Trosch painted *Japanese Lesson*; *Rabbit* is by Ed Ruscha. Baccarat 1960s chandelier.

Before



After

After



You must be prepared  
to care enough about some things, things that  
are within your power to acquire to incorporate them  
in your schemes without regard to what is considered  
safe or correct or what the magazines say or what the people  
next door think. This job is complicated so I cannot explain it  
briefly. I'm off to practice my golf. Letstry again. If people only  
had colour-shape concepts they would have a special  
word for a red square and one for a red  
circle and one for a green circle  
etc.



Before



RIGHT: Another living room was transformed into the master bedroom. BELOW: "It's calm and soothing and has a different feeling from the rest of the residence," Barman points out. *Solitaire* is by Duncan Hannah. Karl Kemp table, left. J. Robert Scott chairs and ottoman. Donghia lamp.

husband likes to tell people that he found me downtown."

Gorlin is on record as insisting firmly, even heretically, that architecture and decorating are autonomous domains, and he overlapped very little with the clients' interior designer, John Barman. The architect was responsible for all the cabinetry and woodwork, and the decorator chose the hardware and decided what color to stain the oak, but once the structural framework was finished—new everything, including brushed-steel casement windows custom-made in England to landmark specifications—the content providers took the helm. "It's challenging to furnish a big, exposed space like the lower



After



Before



LEFT: The master sitting room was fashioned from the former library. BELOW: Gorlin redid the casement windows looking out to Central Park in brushed steel and added hidden shades and simple moldings. Daybed from John Boone. Patter-son, Flynn & Martin carpet.

floor," says Barman. "It's like scoring a symphony rather than a chamber suite. Each zone has a separate function, but there are no fixed boundaries. And from every angle, the eye registers the totality of the décor, so it had to be flawless."

But Barman and his associate, Kelly Graham, also readily acknowledge that they enjoyed "the greatest of all luxuries in our profession—starting from scratch. We were working with an adventurous client willing to experiment with an exciting, even slightly offbeat, ensemble of furnishings and with blocks of undiluted color. Her former apartment was charming and quirky but dominated by the art, which was hung fairly randomly.

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After

## WHERE THE ART IS

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It begged for editing, and she trusted me to do it. We agreed that Déco-influenced upholstered furniture with clean lines, soft curves and very little embellishment would best complement the paintings, which are nearly all portraits with strong personalities." "And that nicely describes John," adds the wife. "He always knew how far to push me." "I sometimes pushed," Barman admits, "because I knew she wouldn't be happy compromising on luxury or perfection."

One of the most dramatic aspects of the interior design is the mood change between floors. "Upstairs, there's much less edge and more serenity," notes Graham. The family/media room, in an alcove off the stairwell, is a plush cocoon with grass-cloth walls, an ottoman in aubergine leather by Christian Liaigre and a sofa upholstered in a Futurist-inspired velvet. The master suite occupies the prime park-view real estate that was formerly the living room and library of the old apartment and is now a spacious

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**"This project was like an intricate Chinese puzzle," says Gorlin, "a stack of boxy parlors hogging the light."**

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bedroom and sitting room separated by French doors paneled with sandblasted glass. Barman's palette of photographer's white, deep-impact purples and boldly textured patterns—such as the damask on the club chairs—suggests, he says, that "neutral and soothing don't have to mean wimpy. This is her beige room with no beige."

By now the painter was packing up downstairs, and the housekeeper was setting the dining table with the new china that John Barman insisted his client had to buy because the borders—olive tendrils and plummy stripes—so felicitously matched her color scheme. But in this apartment, there is always a master artisan on call for last-minute touch-ups. As the birthday guests began to arrive, Nature was glazing the windows with the inimitable cobalt of a winter twilight. □