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Come Si Dice NEW YORK?

In a Manhattan apartment, A-List designer David Netto tells an Italian story, full of all the rich plot twists and sophisticated drama such a tale deserves.

By DAVID NETTO Photographs by GIEVES ANDERSON
Styled by NICOLETTE CAMILLE

The dining room of an apartment in a 1929 building in Greenwich Village renovated by designer David Netto and Hottenroth + Joseph Architects. George IV mahogany table from Stair Galleries; chairs by India Mahdavi; vintage Murano chandelier; wallcovering by Zuber.

In the entry, Carlo Scarpa chairs complement an 18th-century cabinet from the collection of Henri Samuel. Mirror by Mike Diaz; artwork by Vik Muniz.

Can I let you in on a little secret? I struggle sometimes to get into character when I'm decorating. A design project needs a strong direction—a concept—to resonate with the person who lives there, or the person who looks at pictures of it, or the person who designs it. I was a bit stuck at the beginning here—"nice apartment on lower Fifth Avenue" is not a concept—but I wasn't panicking yet.

The clock, however, was ticking. My wonderful clients had thus far listened to all the advice I offered them. They hired the right architect, David Hottenroth of Hottenroth + Joseph. They let me persuade them to do some unconventional things, opening up room-to-room connections I thought would make for a looser, more loftlike layout. (We were combining two apartments, and I thought we should have fewer and bigger rooms.) In other words, they believed in me. They listened, which, if you're a decorator, is the greatest compliment a client can pay you. Now it was my turn to start living up to the yesses and give them something great.

The lightbulb moment came during a meeting when I was looking down at the client's elegant Italian name staring back at me from the drawings. The concept took the form of a question: Why not make an Italian New York apartment—not for the Agnellis but inspired by them? Make it for us: an eclectic, sophisticated take on New York born out of the ▸

Linen curtains with Samuel & Sons trim separate the kitchen from the dining area. Lacanche range; island counter in honed paonazzo marble; cabinets painted in Benjamin Moore's Classic Gray.

In the living room, a custom sofa in a Dedar fabric is flanked by an 18th-century French armchair and a Billy Baldwin slipper chair. The cocktail table is by Elisabeth Garouste.

"WHY NOT DO AN ITALIAN NEW YORK APARTMENT—
NOT FOR THE AGNELLIS BUT INSPIRED BY THEM?"
—DAVID NETTO

In the music room, a vintage Spanish rug sits on a bleached and stained herringbone floor. Custom armchair by Rose Tarlow.

The breakfast room's Soane table is surrounded by Rose Tarlow chairs. Walls in Benjamin Moore's Newberg Green.

owners' name, yes, but really by the energy I love to chase in interiors defined by radical combinations of new and old, quality being the only constant. Traditional architecture containing modern art; really good 18th-century antiques and silver next to strikingly contemporary furniture. And, most Italian of all, the joyful color palette this no-fear client had requested anyway.

We were off, and the shopping and presentations that led to these pages were one of the most rewarding validations in my career. Consider the objects—and, no less important, the juxtapositions. We have an exceptional pair of Louis XV blue and white ormolu-mounted cachepots supplied by Emilio Terry in the gallery, on a cabinet supplied by Henri Samuel, alongside chairs by Carlo Scarpa. In the living room a Noa mosaic coffee table by Elisabeth Garouste plays well with the most beautiful George III armchair I have ever bought from Gerald Bland. As with the Agnelli houses we were paying playful homage to, we have plenty of Bonacina here—but the gutsy, contemporary kind. Then there are the finishes. The faux Iznik tiles fabricated for the backsplash behind the stove were inspired by a pattern in a museum. Are you digging the groovy zigzag brown and white Parish Hadley floor in the music room? (Yes, we have a music room.) The biggest impact of all, and the room I presented first to set the vivid, sensual mood for the whole project, is delivered by Zuber's Combats des Grecs wallpaper, which turns the dining room into such a world that you might miss the surprise of contemporary rattan chairs by India Mahdavi. But don't do that.

One of the more subtle Italianisms is the height at which the door hardware is mounted, a little farther up than

American style (in a Venetian palazzo you will see a butler have to reach *up* for the knob). Perhaps this is because of the bigger scale of the doors. I saw Renzo Mongiardino use this trick at 778 Park Avenue for Peter Sharp in one of the most theatrical New York apartments ever made (I've never seen it in the New World since). The effect is less visual than sensual—a little unfamiliarity in how you feel moving from space to space. Taste is really governed by smell, attraction is about pheromones, and the best decorating always triggers more senses than just the eye.

Getting yesses in pitch mode doesn't mean you won't have to defend your choices later. Among the most important qualifications for this job is the ability to make (and win) an argument. On our project it happened with the architectural mirror I had liberally deployed to double the light and add glamour. Many mirrored walls are easy to say yes to on paper, but also easy to mistake for Halstonesque decadence on an overcast morning with everything around still unfinished. I suggested that the effect, rather than implying we were about to blow some rails, would in the end make walls "invisible." Always make time for these "hold the course" conversations. And if the conversation doesn't end with "I trust you," you're not done yet.

So what have we learned? In a compliment to the lady of the house, who loves to entertain, I'm going to express what happened here as a recipe. 1) Mix equal parts art, guts, and quality. 2) Fold in two cups of the 21st century with one of the 18th. Allow mixture to settle. 3) Add a strong point of view. 4) Most important: Invite everybody over, let the dog in the living room, and don't forget to enjoy yourself in there. ■

In the primary bedroom, a Ralph Lauren bed is paired with a Louis XVI–style bench from the collection of Hubert de Givenchy. Louis XVI armchair in a Miles Redd check fabric from Schumacher. Artwork (right) by Joan Miró.

A John Stephan artwork hangs above a custom credenza in the living room. Side table by Bonacina; lamp by Aero Studios.

In the den of a vacation home in Sag Harbor, New York, designed by James Huniford, with architecture by William Reue, a painting by Robert Dash hangs over a custom sofa. Vintage armchair (left) in a Savel fabric; lamps by Peter Lane.

Opposite: A dock behind the house allows water access to Upper Sag Harbor Cove.

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A-List designer
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By MICHAEL