The Three P's

Prewar, penthouse, and Park Avenue are magic words for David Kleinberg.

photography: ivo leipnet
A rooftop getaway in the middle of Manhattan is a precious thing alone. But added sophistication decor that defers to the contemporary-art holdings of two passionate collectors and a panoramic view over the Central Park reservoir to the equation, and the product equals far more than the sum of its impressive parts. "My clients thought it would be wonderful to entertain up here, almost as if it was their weekend house," David Kleinberg says. That would make their "primary residence" the two stories directly below—where David Kleinberg Design Associates entered the picture a dozen years ago.

At that time, the prewar Park Avenue building's original penthouse triple was divided, the top level being its own apartment. When Kleinberg's clients bought it and reconnected it with their two lower levels, the 3,000 square feet were cut up into small rooms. "We blew it out," he says. "And left it open as a light-filled box." He also installed floor-to-ceiling windows and French doors around three sides of the perimeter.

That highly contemporary sensibility reflects a significant evolution. It started with lower-level classic 1980s miami interior, which Kleinberg updated. He refurbished several of the existing English and Continental antiques but mixed them with French pieces from the mid-20th century and subtle floor coverings in hand-loomed wool or jute-and-leather. The entry's parquet was striking, doors were paneled mahogany, and the limestone mantel was long and low. When the time came to think about what to put on the walls, Kleinberg—who does not consider himself an art consultant—mentioned a few artists and galleries that interested him personally. The wife "took it up with a vengeance," he says with a laugh. Then, as often happens in the

Previous spread: Standing on the terrace of a New York City apartment by David Kleinberg Design Associates is David Bruno's sculpture in bronze and wood.

Opposite top: In the living area, seating covered in cotton canvas surrounds a trio of round polished steel tables. All are custom.

Opposite bottom: The Bunch sculpture overlooks the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Reservoir.

Top, from left: A view of the West Ambaria is projected on the wall over the dining area's laborious by SI. Robblandi Gardens and two-suits sculpture by MaRie Popper. The magnificent brass hands connect blackened iron brackets. Bottom: Bronze pendant accented the living area's fixtures, which dispels static to keep the sculpture's hair static. A side view of room Jingle, when the living room is fitted with a glass top.
collecting game, many years of researching and contemplating began to send these Upper East Siders in an increasingly experimental direction. Both they and Kleinberg, taking a preliminary walk through of the penthouse, saw an opportunity to reflect much of their recently acquired art.

Whereas there’s a Cubist-inspired oil on canvas by Suzy Frelinghuyzen in the living room downstairs, a projector concealed in the ceiling of the penthouse dining area beams a video of a Ricci Albenda video—panning across an abstract architectural space—onto the wall above an elaborated sideboard by T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings. David Brooks, whose work appears in “Greater New York 2010,” now having its run at the Museum of Modern Art’s P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, is responsible for the sculpture standing among the potted trees and teak furniture on the penthouse’s wraparound terrace: an anthropomorphic bronze pierced by multiple wooden rods in a way that’s reminiscent of the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian. In terms of architecture, the best symbol of this shift in sensibility is the staircase’s balustrade as it ascends from the apartment’s middle level to the penthouse. The blackened-iron balusters start out incorporating a traditional diamond shape; a few feet from the upper landing, that motif disappears in favor of simple uprights.
The stairs deposit people right in the living area, by the fireplace. Kleinberg created a comfortable seating area with a sofa and lounge chairs covered in a cream bouclé. On the braced oval rug sit a trio of mirror-polished steel cocktail tables with tops shaped like paint splatters. (The shapes were designed on a computer, then blown up and made into templates to be die-cut.) Many of the changes are subtle, the sort hardly noticed on first impression. The bleached and pickled oak floor is new, for example. "That sounds old-fashioned but seems modern again," Kleinberg says. "And it reflects so much light." Accessed ceiling fixtures supplement it.

Between the dining area and the galley kitchen, mechanicals and a powder room are housed in a block that clearly had to stay put, so Kleinberg sheathed it in bleached wenge to contrast with the all-white walls and ceiling. "I like the texture and color of wenge," he explains, adding that the bleaching brings out a grainy tactility. A few feet away stands a cross-shape structural column. Kleinberg transformed it into a sculptural element by cladding it in bronze with a dark statuary patina, like the columns of that more famous light-filled box, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s Barcelona Pavilion.

PRODUCT SOURCES

For more information, see page 220.

PROJECT STAFF

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Furniture sources: Anthony Lawrence-Belford, President; Nicole Lagerquist, Design Director; Anne Hatta, Design Coordinator; Mark Bahorik, Six Sigma Coordinator; Miguel Badillo, Director of Operations; Andrea Santoro, Production Manager; Jennifer Johnson, Project Manager; Lisa Benjamin, Interior Designer; Betsy Schindler, Coordinating Designer; Margaret McAllister, Project Designer; Anne McCurdy, Color Consultant; Julie Schreiber, Construction Manager.

Opposite top: The powder room’s corner-located marble vanity contains a nickel-plated sink. Opposite bottom: In the dining area, Mesa Selton, a custom cherrywood dining table stands under a custom tray ceiling. Above: The breakfast nook is located in the kitchen, which contains a custom banquette upholstered in fabric. To the left: The living room is equipped with a custom sofa and a custom chaise longue. To the right: The bedroom is decorated with a custom bed and a custom nightstand. Below: A custom sideboard contains a frosted glass top and an embossed ash-wood base.

Above the bedroom's custom sofa bed are draped drapes with mitered window treatments. The bedroom's sink vanity contains a custom sideboard with a frosted glass top and an embossed ash-wood base.

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