

revel in the details

With his subtle, sophisticated touch, designer David Kleinberg imparts contemporary refinement to every corner of an art-collecting couple's airy Manhattan penthouse

*By Stephen Wallis
Photography by Francesco Lagnese
Styled by Howard Christian*

A Helen Frankenthaler painting casts a golden glow in the living room of an Upper East Side penthouse, where designer David Kleinberg installed custom seating around an Apparatus cocktail table. An Antony Gormley sculpture stands along the opposite wall, and a work by Phillip Guston hangs between the windows, overlooking a custom sectional sofa grouped with an Hervé Van der Straeten tiered console and a swirling cocktail table by Maria Pergay. The vintage plaster ceiling lights are from Lerebours Antiques, and the rug is by Mitchell Denburg. For details see Sources.

The first call wasn't particularly promising:



When a couple who admired designer David Kleinberg's interiors reached out to him several years ago about redoing the family room and kitchen of their home outside New York City, his inclination was to politely pass. "It just didn't seem like something I could really have an effect on," he says. But he kept the door open, and soon after, they came back to him with another opportunity that did pique his interest: designing a large apartment in the city from scratch, overseeing every detail, tip to tail.

Long story short, several months later both projects were a go, and it proved to be the beginning of an exceptionally fruitful collaboration. Kleinberg has not only designed the couple's 6,000-square-foot, three-bedroom Upper East Side penthouse and updated their house in the suburbs but is also about to conceive his second vacation home for them. He's even worked on residences for their adult children.

"It's been a great relationship," Kleinberg says, with characteristic understatement, a quality celebrated in his elegant interiors, which he infuses with a confident sophistication rooted in traditional principles smartly calibrated to modern sensibilities. Kleinberg's deft hand at balancing past and present was a key attraction for the clients. Their previous pied-à-terre had been in a Park Avenue prewar building, and they wanted this penthouse to feel more contemporary, in part to better showcase artworks from their substantial collection that spans from the early 20th century to today. But it also had to be a welcoming place for gathering family, including young grandchildren, who were "coming fast and furious," says Kleinberg.

Thanks to a 2,800-square-foot terrace—with plantings by landscape designer Edmund Hollander—the penthouse offers rare indoor-outdoor high-rise living. Floor-to-ceiling expanses of glass add to the sense of openness and connection with the outside. "The terraces wrap around practically every single room, and it's all about the amazing light and airiness," says the wife.

Opting to take the apartment as raw space, the clients entrusted Kleinberg to mastermind everything, starting with some tweaks to the layout that included reconfiguring awkward hallways to enhance circulation and punching through walls to create a graceful enfilade joining all the entertaining areas. "I like rooms where you can travel through them and don't have to turn around to leave," says the designer.

In the entrance hall, Kleinberg dug deep into his bag of tricks to deal with an obtrusive HVAC system. Rather than bringing the ceiling down to an unappealing height, he finished it in shimmering gray Venetian plaster and hung a large white-lacquer oval—"a surfboard kind of thing," as Kleinberg playfully describes it—that hides the ductwork and doubles as a lighting installation. Its shape is artfully mirrored

A ceramic sculpture by Steen Ipsen rests on the living room's Apparatus table, which features a sandblasted Lucite base and a specially colored top. OPPOSITE: The terrace's outdoor furniture is by Sutherland and upholstered in fabrics by Perennials and Jim Thompson; the landscaping was overseen by Hollander Design.



In the entrance hall, Kleinberg collaborated with Orsman Design to create a ceiling lighting installation whose oval shape is mirrored in the limestone and marble-mosaic floor. A Mattia Bonetti console from David Gill Gallery stands opposite a Pat Steir canvas, and a Richard Artschwager painting of Marcel Breuer's building for the Whitney Museum of American Art hangs in the opening to the hallway beyond.

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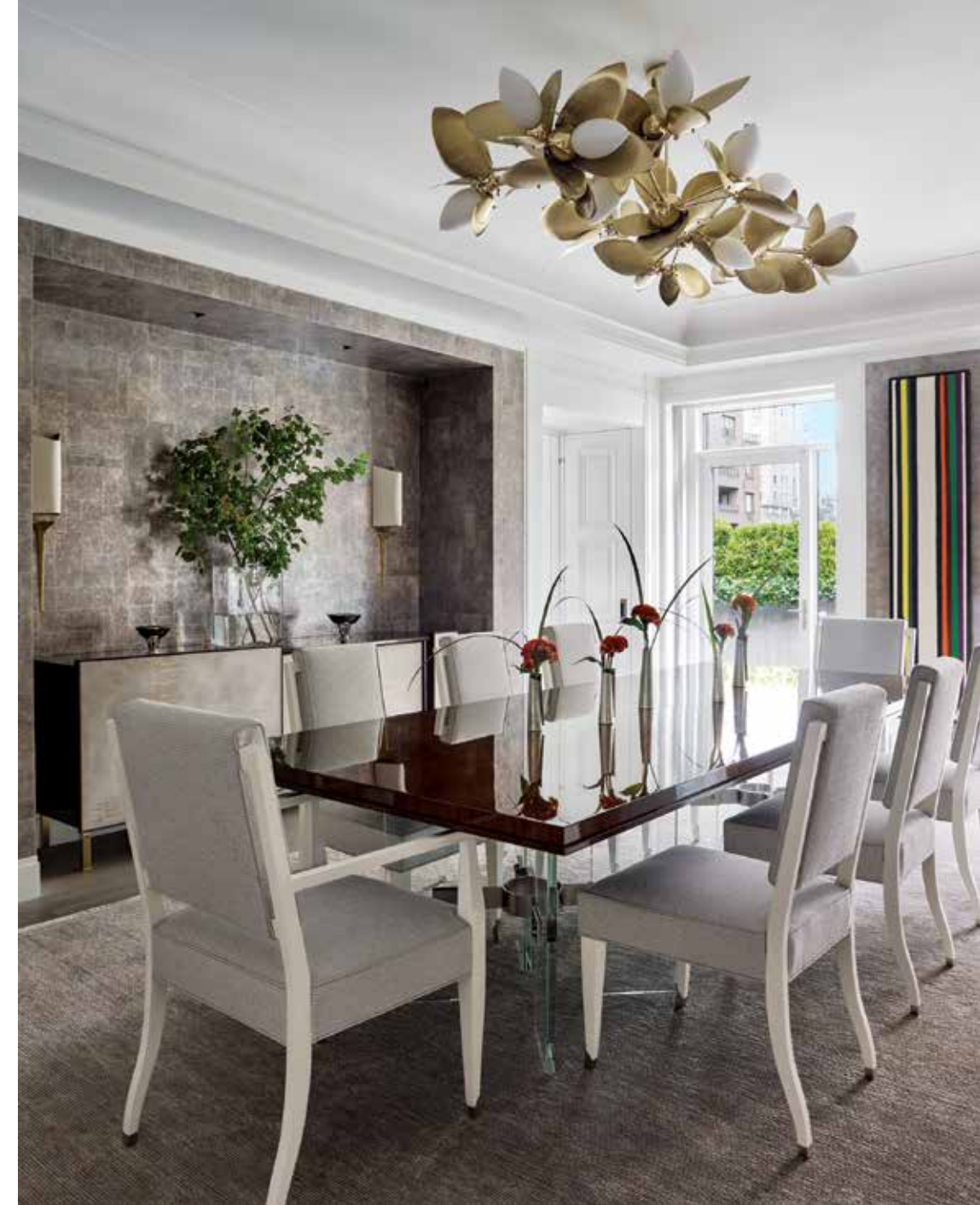
A light fixture by Rosie Li hovers above a table custom made by Studio Van den Akker in the dining room, where mica paneling Kleinberg commissioned from Mary Kuzma Finishing sheathes the walls. Kuzma’s studio also made parchment doors for the Kleinberg-designed sideboard installed in the niche beneath Felix Agostini sconces from Donghia. The striped painting is by Morris Louis, and the rug is by Edward Fields.

in the limestone and marble-mosaic floor below, riffing on a design device famously used by the 18th-century architect Robert Adam. “If it was good enough for Adam, it was good enough for me,” says Kleinberg, who also embellished the entry area doors with panels of striking reverse-painted glass. Add to that mix an exquisite sculptural metal console by Mattia Bonetti, along with major paintings by Pat Steir and Richard Artschwager, and a potentially problematic space becomes a highlight.

Celebrated for his subtle yet imaginative use of texture and materials, Kleinberg devised numerous distinctive details throughout, such as the patinated-nickel strapping that runs across the family room’s upholstered walls, lining up just so with the shelves of bespoke anigre-and-nickel bookcases. Door casings in the living and dining rooms feature a magnificent pattern of asymmetrically stepped rectilinear forms, inspired partly by Italian architect Carlo Scarpa’s midcentury designs. “We didn’t want the apartment to be like a gallery, so there needed to be the architectural interest and the layering of a classic apartment,” says Kleinberg.

In the dining room, the designer clad the walls in panels of mica, which he refers to as “a luscious, yummy material,” while in the hallway just beyond he installed an eye-catching bar with straw marquetry cabinet fronts and a translucent cast-resin countertop embedded with roiling crystalline forms. “It has this rather magical effect,” says Kleinberg, adding, “My life is all about subtle things.”

Furnishings consist largely of custom pieces by Kleinberg’s studio and commissioned works by designers like Christophe Côme, Hervé Van der Straeten, and Apparatus. Kleinberg sprinkled in a few vintage contemporary selections, notably the living room’s Maria Pergay table, composed of swirling shell shapes in stainless steel with inlays of fossilized stone.



In keeping with the desire for a calm, clean aesthetic, Kleinberg adhered to a neutral palette of “22 shades of off-white,” he jokes, noting that the use of Venetian plaster, fabric, and mica on walls provides a sense of variation. Occasional pops of color come mostly from works of art, including the living room’s vast Helen Frankenthaler, a new acquisition whose luminous yellow ground stops you in your tracks.

Artworks that were on display in the couple’s Park Avenue residence have been reanimated by the penthouse setting. “In my other apartment the art just didn’t show the same way—things are looking better, breathing better,” says the wife. “Friends ask if things we had for years are new.” It’s a mistaken impression Kleinberg would no doubt welcome as the perfect compliment. □



An artwork by Adolph Gottlieb hangs in the husband's cerused-oak-paneled office, which is furnished with a Kleinberg-designed desk topped in Edelman leather, a Jacques Jarrige lamp, an Eames desk chair, Vladimir Kagan armchairs, and a rug by Edward Fields. BELOW: The primary bedroom walls are clad in a Jim Thompson silk, while the upholstered bed, bench, and curtains were all made with Rogers & Goffigon fabrics. Holly Hunt sconces are mounted above the custom nightstands, and the glass-top table is attributed to FontanaArte. OPPOSITE: In the family room, Kleinberg used the same Pollack fabric on the armchairs and the walls, which feature a nickel strapping detail that aligns with anigre-and-nickel bookcases; the painting above the custom sofa is by Kenneth Noland, the ceiling fixture is by Atelier Alain Ellouz, the sconces are Charles Paris designs from Donghia, and the rug is by Scott Group Studio.

