



DEPTH CHARGE

Designer David Kleinberg adds warmth and grace to a Manhattan apartment that was once all about the view

Establishing a sense of warmth and character in a new building can be difficult, designer David Kleinberg notes. Especially with contemporary apartments, where no matter how gracious the floor plan or elevated the materials, there's always a risk the space will feel like a Sheetrock box. This was the challenge the New York decorator faced when Los Angeles-based clients brought their intended pied-à-terre to his attention: a prime corner unit in a stately new Manhattan residential tower.

Kleinberg—who at the time was in the early stages of overhauling the California home of the couple and their two teenage daughters—started by encouraging them to purchase a unit a few floors below the one they'd initially looked at in the then-unfinished building. “Not knowing much about New York [at that point], I thought I’d want to be up high,” the husband recalls. “But David explained that the best location is three or four floors above the trees.” Adds Kleinberg, “It’s a perspective that doesn’t feel inhuman.”



Clockwise from left: A Louise Nevelson sculpture stands tall in a Manhattan apartment renovated by David Kleinberg Design Assoc. (dkda.com). Jules Leleu floor lamps flank a satinwood daybed in the living room. A Lee Krasner artwork hangs on a nearby wall.

The four-bedroom flat they ultimately purchased has a welcoming layout, with all of the spaces revolving around a central foyer. Still, Kleinberg saw room for improvement, namely in the dining area, a space that offered no view of the park. “The only thing you saw was the adjacent building,” says the designer, who corrected this shortcoming by closing up the room’s foyer entrance and opening the space to the living room and the Central Park treetops beyond. He also separated the kitchen/family room into two independent spaces, noting, “The client wanted more of a divide between church and state.”

Small but critical adjustments came next: raising the height of doorframes, staining the oak floors a deep cordovan, and swapping out wan crown moldings and baseboards for more refined versions that, Kleinberg says, “provide a bespoke quality.” →

REINVENTION



Clockwise from above: The library's Eugène Printz desk and chair face a Sol LeWitt work. The dining room features an Arredoluce chandelier and paintings by Helen Frankenthaler (left) and Theodoros Stamos. A Yayoi Kusama presides over the master bedroom.

As for the decor, one of the designer's principal goals was to warm the apartment with textures. This he achieved through a variety of wall treatments, from the gold linen that stripes the master bedroom to the silvery tea paper that shimmers in the dining room. In the library, meanwhile, he paneled the walls in bleached wenge—an alternative, Kleinberg observes, to the classic master-of-the-universe mahogany. The surfaces offer striking backdrops for the clients' art, mostly paintings by New York School stars like Helen Frankenthaler, Richard Pousette-Dart, and Lee Krasner—many with swirling brushwork that adds a lyrical air to the residence.

A similar focus on lightness is apparent in the furnishings, among them wonderfully fluid midcentury French and Italian pieces. In the living room, for instance, a Eugène Printz desk with arching legs is accompanied by a svelte Diego Giacometti iron-and-bronze chair. The library, anchored by a suede-covered sofa modeled after an influential original in Coco Chanel's Paris apartment, features a Félix Agostini cocktail table made of glass and gilded bronze that provides the otherwise masculine zone with a touch of the ethereal. "Our California home used to be very heavy and dark," the husband says. "Thanks to David, we've been lightening things up."



Despite the presence of myriad 1930s and '40s masterworks, Kleinberg stresses that the intention was not to make the apartment into a period piece. In fact much of its buoyant, optimistic character can be traced to a sensitive juxtaposition of forms and eras—as in the way the dining room's leafy circa-1950 gilt chandelier proves a lively foil to the regal 18th-century Italian commodes standing a few feet away. "The whole point was to create something very serene but with the feeling of New York," Kleinberg says.

No element better exemplifies this spirit than the remarkable white-painted wood sculpture by Louise Nevelson that towers in the foyer. Spare and elegant, the skyscraper-like work is in lockstep with Kleinberg's quality-first design philosophy: "Each thing is a good thing." It's an approach that guided him and his clients as they fashioned a home away from home that manages to be restrained yet inviting. As the husband notes, plainly pleased by the results, "Every time we go to New York, I'm struck by how comfortable and timeless this apartment is." —BRAD GOLDFARB