



arresting affect

Spectacular photography becomes the focus of a setting marked by subdued colors and stylish lines

TEXT: THOMAS CONNORS
PHOTOGRAPHY: NATHAN KIDEMAN

*W*hen you've got a classic New York penthouse with a view to die for, it seems only natural to go for a classic interior. That's just what designers Mary Cox and Michael Foley had in mind for a client with a duplex residence in a pre-war building overlooking Carl Schurz Park on the city's Upper East Side. Which isn't to say they went old school. The duo, who launched an interiors division for Ralph Lauren before starting Foley & Cox in 2002, combined a confident sense of scale and proportion with an eye for the contemporary to create a home that is artfully composed and utterly current.





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In revivifying this Manhattan aerie, Cox and Foley—whose projects range from a chalet in Austria to a 150-foot yacht—made sure that they didn't fuss with bones of the space too much. "It's all about appropriateness," says Cox. "A house in Austria is very different from a New York City apartment. So we worked within an architectural style that's appropriate to the space and the client's needs." This client needed to accommodate a growing art collection. And with one child in college and another well into her teens, the idea was to create an environment that is geared more toward grown-up entertaining than family friendly living. "We give a lot of small dinner parties and cocktail parties several times a year," relates the homeowner. "And I do an annual Memorial Day party on the terrace to kick off the summer."

As so often happens with a redecorating endeavor, the collaborative dialogue between client and designers propelled the project from a simple tweaking to a whole new take on the space. "I wanted to change the furniture, repaint the walls," recalls the homeowner. "Then Mary and Michael said, 'If we're going to lighten the walls and get rid of the furniture, the whole envelop should be changed.' All of a sudden we went from 'Let's change the walls to beige and lighten the furniture' to 'Let's change the molding.' So the project took on a life of its own."





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The family had lived for years in Malibu and was mad for sunlight and fresh air. So Foley and Cox did their best to create a laid-back atmosphere with an arresting urban chic. The previous color scheme of yellow, gold and red was jettisoned in favor of a more neutral palette. Wood floors took the place of carpeting in every room. Traditional moldings were removed from the walls, and a pair of columns that had been installed to demarcate the living room from the dining room was eliminated to re-emphasize the home's essentially open plan. The designers added simple architectural embellishments, such as a ziggurat detail in the ceiling and a new mantelpiece, to subtly reflect the art deco charm of the exterior facade, then expanded the client's existing inventory of furniture. "We don't want our spaces to be instantly identified with us," remarks Foley. "It's more about the things clients have and how they want to live."

The large-scale photographs by such contemporary masters as Hiroshi Sugimoto, Thomas Struth and Candida Höfer are truly the focal point of these interiors, and the designers and their client have assembled a gathering of furnishings whose shapes, lines and colors make them a perfect counterpoint, as richly visual in their way as the images on the walls. In the living room, chairs covered in a zebra-print strike a compelling pose; a side table fashioned

from a rough-hewn block of coal (by artist Jim Zivic of Burning Relic Design Studio) is a stunning visitor from the natural world.

For the dining room, Foley and Cox designed a set of simple chairs with graceful legs to accompany the homeowners' 30s era dining table, over which they hung a jaunty, glass chandelier. A woven leather floor covering from Keleen Leather is an unusual touch, sybaritic, yet subtle. And with its white, cream and pale yellow palette, the roomy master suite is a soothing respite, complete with an intimate seating area across from a fireplace and an office space in the corner outfitted with luscious lacquer shelves and a parchment-covered desk.

Rich materials and finishes, and the unerring eye with which each piece has been placed leave no doubt that these interiors were meticulously executed. But the effect is one of simple, stylish comfort—high end, not highfalutin. Lively, without being overly dramatic, composed but far from chilly, this residence is both welcoming and striking at once. And for the homeowner, a never-ending delight. "It's such a thrill to look around everywhere and feel good and like what you see," she enthuses. "Every direction I turn, it's pleasing to me." □ Mary Cox and Michael Foley, Foley & Cox Interiors, 5 East 20th Street, New York, NY 212.529.5800 foleyandcox.com