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TODAY'S GREATEST TALENTS IN ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN



PLUS: SPECTACULAR HOMES BY
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SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT

Undertaking a rare residential commission, the Rockwell Group devises a sleek, sumptuously modern penthouse high above Manhattan

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In the foyer of a New York City apartment designed by the Rockwell Group, a Joan Mitchell painting surmounts a bespoke bronze credenza; a bronze chair by Claude Lalanne lends a grace note. The space is partially set off from the living room by a curtain made of gold-leafed glass orbs. **Opposite:** Cered-oak millwork inset with panels of white onyx trimmed in silver nickel lines the entrance hall; a Karl Springer vase rests on the marble-and-bronze console. For details see Sources.

FOR DECADES, AMONG A CERTAIN SWATH OF NEW YORK SOCIETY, ONLY A HANDFUL OF ADDRESSES WERE CONSIDERED TRULY DESIRABLE—

chief among them the gilded stretches of Park and Fifth avenues on the Upper East Side. But as an array of high-end luxury buildings continues to rise in other parts of the city, the real-estate pecking order has loosened. It's a shift illustrated by one couple's search for a new apartment. Owners of a beautifully appointed residence in a prime Park Avenue building, the pair set out to find a prewar full-floor unit with substantially more space in the same neighborhood. Simple enough, it would seem, but as the wife came to discover, "It didn't exist." So a friend suggested they look up—all the way up to a high-in-the-sky penthouse that had just become available in a glittering new tower.

Though not in their preferred location (and most definitely not prewar), the nearly 9,000-square-foot property offered plenty of space and high ceilings, as well as panoramic views provided by glass curtain walls and two 100-foot-long terraces. For the husband it was love at first sight; for the wife it took a few more visits. But as she readily acknowledges, "If there's one thing my husband has taught me, it's how to make a U-turn."

Still, it was clear to both that remaking the already built-out apartment into the showstopper they envisioned would require the help of an inventive designer. Once again the search would prove elusive. "I met with people for about a year, but I just never felt that excitement," the wife recalls. Until, that is, she had dinner one evening at the restaurant Adour (since closed) in the St. Regis hotel and noted how the landmarked room had been cleverly transformed with lighting and rich, modernizing details without altering any of the original elements. "It was the first time I got that *wow!* feeling," she says. After learning that *wow* was courtesy of acclaimed New York architect and designer David Rockwell, she sought him out. Though his firm is best known for hotel and restaurant interiors and theater sets, Rockwell agreed to take on the couple's penthouse as one of his rare residential commissions. "It's not the kind of work we typically do," he says. "But I was intrigued by their way of looking at the project through the filter of hospitality."

Active philanthropists, the husband and wife entertain often, so they needed spaces suitable for large gatherings. At the same time, they wanted to establish a graceful flow that would keep the apartment's capacious volume from feeling overwhelming. In response, Rockwell devised a floor



The living room—which offers panoramic views of the city—is furnished with Rockwell Group–designed seating framed in shagreen and upholstered in a Manuel Canovas fabric; the cocktail table is a 1970 creation by Fernand Dresse, and the side table is by Lalanne.



Above: A light fixture custom crafted of Swarovski crystals casts a glow on the dining room walls, which are finished in silver Venetian plaster. **Opposite, clockwise from top left:** One corner of the living room features a bronze bar with a white onyx top and, behind it, shelves filled with Lalique vases and Baccarat glassware. Presiding over the room is a Helen Frankenthaler painting; the conical ceramic piece on the table is by Rick Dillingham. The kitchen, which has cerused-oak cabinetry and a nickel-tile backsplash, is outfitted with a Wolf range, hood, and ovens and an undercounter wine-storage unit by Sub-Zero.

plan around the building's central core, anchoring key spaces (living room, dining room, the wife's office, and the master bedroom) at each corner of the apartment. And thanks to thoughtfully placed pocket and hidden doors, the owners can open up or close off various rooms, corridors, even vistas, allowing the residence to pivot between expansive and intimate. "I like guests to be surprised," explains the wife.

Honoring the clients' request for something glamorous but low-key, the designer and his crew employed cerused oak for doors and baseboards, Venetian plaster for walls, platinum leaf for ceiling coves, and a multitude of burnished stones. "I've never had a client interested in investing in this level of materiality," remarks Rockwell, who adds that "we didn't want anything on the ceiling or walls that would create a reflection on the windows and stop you from seeing the surroundings." At night the rooms are gently illuminated by extraordinary light fixtures—notably a massive piece in the dining room specially crafted using thousands of Swarovski crystals—imbuing the apartment with a distinctly dreamy glow.

Working with the clients' impressive collection of modern and contemporary art, including large-scale pieces by Helen Frankenthaler, Anish Kapoor, Joan Mitchell, and Louise Nevelson, Rockwell and his team elected to play with a predominantly neutral color palette and low-slung furniture, much of it custom made. This approach is especially striking in the living room and adjacent bar area, where understated seating—clean modern lines, frames of bleached shagreen or cerused oak, and pale upholstery—allows the art and the city views to take center stage. Not that Rockwell is opposed to a judiciously deployed exclamation point or two, which here come mostly in shades of gold and bronze. There's a cast-bronze bar topped with white onyx, an enchanting curtain of gold-leafed glass orbs, and a bespoke bronze credenza with a muscularly rippled front, flanked by a pair of sculptural Claude Lalanne chairs in the same material. For the wife's creamy white-marble bath, Rockwell persuaded her to sheathe the wall above the tub in gold mosaic tile, she recounts, by suggesting that each time she gazes into the mirror she'd "look like a Gustav Klimt painting."

The balancing act between serene and sensational is evident throughout the apartment. On the one hand, there's the airy master bedroom, with its ivory parchment walls and elegantly streamlined 1930s-French-inspired sofa; on the other, the dining room's stunning 15-foot-wide expanse of glass-enclosed wine storage—the bottles lit like priceless jewels. But then, dramatic contrasts are one of the pleasures of being perched this high above the city: At times you're enveloped in a cloud, while at others, in the words of the wife, "it's like looking out over a carnival." □



Above: A 1970s painting by Roy Hamilton is displayed over the leather-upholstered bed in a guest room; a Pratesi cashmere throw accents the bench. **Opposite, from top:** Polished-nickel tiles sheathe a powder room, which is crowned by a '60s Hans Harald Rath chandelier based on the iconic Sputnik-inspired fixtures he created for New York's Metropolitan Opera House. In the master bedroom foyer, a Cindy Sherman photograph from 1993 hangs above an iron-and-glass cabinet.



Above: The walls and headboard in the master bedroom are paneled in parchment; the cerused-oak nightstands with crackled-mirror tops are custom designs, and the chair is upholstered in a Manuel Canovas fabric. **Opposite, from top:** A wall in the wife's bath is embellished with gold-leafed glass-mosaic tile, and the tub features Dornbracht fittings. Gray river stone lines the husband's bath; the sink fittings are by Dornbracht.