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ARTFULLY COMPOSED

*Designer Bennett Leifer crafts a pied-à-terre
on Gramercy Park that distills the best of its old-world neighborhood*

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In the living room of an apartment on New York's Gramercy Park designed by Bennett Leifer, the custom settee is upholstered in a Sabina Fay Braxton velvet, and a pair of carved wood armchairs by de Gournay are covered in a Stark velvet; the Empire console is from Lucca Antiques, the cocktail table is by Ebanista, the vintage stool is by Malson Bagués, the Louis XVI secretary was found on 1stdibs, the Tabriz rug is antique, and the walls are painted in Benjamin Moore's Alexandria Beige. For details, see Resources.

The dining room's Côté France chairs are tailored in a
Hyland fabric, with seats in a Kismet velvet. The custom
design, the 1950s mirror is by Lobmeyr, the wall
by de Gournay, the Tabriz rug is early 20th century, the
of a Cowtan & Tout fabric, and the artwork is by
OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: In the living room, the
chair is covered in a Clarence House velvet, and the artwork
Assaf Shaham. The library's leather armchairs and side chairs are
Restoration Hardware, the custom bench is upholstered in velvet
leather, the shades are of a Fortuny fabric, the rug is by
Carpet & Home, and the walls are painted in Farrow & Ball
Room Red. The kitchen's range is by Wolf, the sink and
Lefroy Brooks, the cabinetry is by Smallbone of Devon, and the
Bertola barstool is by Knoll. For details, see page 100.



EN DESIGNERS SPEAK of “bringing the outdoors in,” they’re usually referring to bucolic themes and countrified hills. In cities, by contrast, most people prefer to keep the outdoors out. But for an apartment overlooking New York City’s Gramercy Park, designer Bennett Leifer envisioned rooms that would pay homage to the environment beyond the windows—not only the trees and sky, but also the architecture, arts, and culture that have lent their spirit to the historic district. “We’re aiming for a capsule of Gramercy Park life—refined and personalized, but totally unpretentious,” says Leifer.

For the clients, he offered the perfect setting to put down roots in the bustle of the big city. Having grown up abroad, they sought a place with a strong sense of home. “They wanted it to be special but easy,” the designer says, adding that it needed to accommodate extended family, international friends, and business associates as graciously as it would just the two of them.

At that end, Leifer set out to design rooms at once elegant and modern. “The palette is precious but patinated,” he says. “None of the gold is bright and shiny; it’s all oxidized or oil-rubbed.” He chose silk velvets, polished stone, and antique rugs likewise worn softly. The silk living room curtains are gathered in a nonchalant slouch. And in a nod to the eclecticism of the neighborhood’s architectural styles, Leifer included furnishings that span two-and-a-half centuries. In the living room, for example, 18th-century antiques mix it up with Gustavian, mid-19th-century, and contemporary pieces.

Leifer had just started his own firm when he landed this project, having previously worked in the offices of Robert A.M. Sutermeister, Juan Pablo Molyneux, and Scott Snyder. “I learned a lot about different design sensibilities and business models,” says Leifer. “It was a great experience. He also acquired the confidence necessary to take on a project of this scope. “In a 4,000-square-foot apartment, not everything can feel special, whatever your budget,” he says. “It would get overwhelming.”

Luckily, the clients were interested in acquiring pieces based on personality as much as pedigree. “For them, it’s less about price than about their own aesthetic and emotional



response,” he says. This allowed the designer to propose a sophisticated rethinking of the high-low ethos. Above a walnut console in the living room, for example, hangs an unrestored mirror, its matte gesso frame edged in a gilt fillet. A neoclassical plaster bust stands cheek to cheek with a 21st-century reproduction. In the library, custom walnut millwork surrounds contemporary leather chairs.

A restrained, neutral palette unites the mix while linking it to the world outside. In the living room, which overlooks park and sky, Leifer relied on earth tones and luminous blues. He worked with deep reds and browns in the library, which has views of an old brick mansion. The dining room glows with light reflected off its gold-leaf wallcovering.

The verdant park offered a jumping-off point for other flights of fancy. Stylized natural forms appear throughout the rooms:



In the master bedroom, the custom bed is dressed in Frette linens, the coronet and curtains are of a Rogers & Goffigon fabric, the bench by Lars Bolander is upholstered in a Rubelli fabric, the rug is by Stark, and the walls are covered in Phillip Jeffries's Japanese Silk. **OPPOSITE, FROM TOP:** The guest-room bed, armchair, and Ben Soleimani rug are from Restoration Hardware; the desk and nightstand are by Chelsea Textiles, the bedding is by Ann Gish and Frette, and the curtains are of a George Smith fabric. The Kohler tub in the wife's master bath has fittings by Lefroy Brooks, and the walls and floor are sheathed in marble. For details, see Resources.





in egg- and pinecone-shaped lamps; in faux-bamboo furniture; in cut-crystal sculptures; in vases the color of a late-afternoon sky. A lampshade is bedecked in pheasant feathers; a Lobmeyr mirror is wreathed in crystal flowers. Fabric patterns, too, are inspired by nature, from the feather motif on the living room pillows to the peony-strewn curtains in the guest bedroom.

An avid art collector himself, Leifer served as an adviser to these clients—and here, too, his philosophy of balancing instinct with investment prevails. “It’s not about what will be in the auction when you pass away,” he says of selecting works. “It’s about living with things you love.” The walls display works by such modern painters as Ellsworth Kelly and Willem de Kooning, along with contemporary pieces by Assaf Shaham and Simen Johan. Several images—elephants on back-painted glass; a watercolor cityscape—reflect the clients’ South Asian heritage.

Gramercy Park is private, enclosed by a wrought-iron fence to which residents of the surrounding buildings possess the only keys, adding to the sense that it’s a world set apart. But no neighborhood exists in a bubble, least of all in Manhattan, where edgy energy infuses the very air. Leifer celebrates this, too, with clever, cutting-edge details, such as powder room wallpaper laser-printed to mimic Victorian plaster moldings and a digitally manipulated peacock photograph that presides over the dining room.

By synthesizing such carefully curated details, Leifer has created an environment as stimulating as it is restorative—an apartment whose walls are not so much barriers to the world outside as filters that welcome in the best of what it has to offer. ■