

In the Grand Manner

For a Manhattan client, Ann Pyne, head of one of America's oldest and most distinguished design firms, gives old-school decorating a surprising new relevance

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In the drawing room of a Manhattan apartment designed by Ann Pyne of McMillen, Inc., the Art Deco mirror is from Bernd Goeckler Antiques, the parchment-top cocktail table is a custom design, a wall sculpture by Thomas Houseago hangs above a sofa upholstered in a linen damask by Mulberry Home, and armchairs covered in a Larsen fabric are paired with a cocktail table by Silas Seandel; 19th-century sculptures from Barbara Israel Garden Antiques flank a photograph of Andy Warhol by Francesco Scavullo, and the rug is by Beauvais. See Resources.



FROM THE EXTERIOR, the townhouse fits right in with the other quietly opulent residences on a leafy street on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Its floor plan is no less classic, consisting of "10 chunky rooms, all in the same proportion," according to designer Ann Pyne.

Perhaps it was this very sameness that inspired the designer, head of the renowned New York firm McMillen, Inc., to give each room a strong, aesthetically distinct identity all its own. This is a house of dramatic transitions. To move from the living room, with its cloudbue palette, to the deep-tone library is to feel as if you've stepped into *The Wizard of Oz* at the point in which the movie bursts into brilliant Technicolor from retro black and white.

The designer and her clients, a professional couple, are longtime friends. The wife worked closely with Pyne on the project, a process she describes as revelatory: "It was opening up a new world, like reading Emily Dickinson for the first time."

The wife, in fact, initiated the idea for the monochromatic living room. "My order for it was that it had to be white and floaty," Pyne recalls. A muted room can be difficult to pull off: Monotony is an ever-present threat. Yet Pyne keeps it handily at bay by layering on textures—"for visual interest," she says—including an array of luxurious fabrics, from the sofa's linen damask to the pale, almost chalky gray velvet upholstery on a pair of fauteuils.

Pyne retained the existing Louis XVI-style paneling and then added period-inspired plaster sconces, so that the living room

LEFT in the library, paintings of peacocks and horses hang above a sofa upholstered in a Manuel Canovas silk velvet, with trim by Samuel & Sons; a pair of lamps by Tiffany Studios, purchased from Rago, sits atop reproduction Chinese cabinets, and the 19th-century needlepoint rug is English. **ABOVE**: A gilt-wood mirror over the library's marble fireplace, which, like the bookcases, is original to the apartment; Pyne brightened the existing painted walls with a coat of varnish. See Resources.



appears at first glance neoclassical, from the twist of its draperies to the garden statuary set before the French windows. And yet for all its 18th-century underpinnings, it contains modern elements as well, such as a striking cylindrical table of polished steel with a 1920s feel—a piece that is actually contemporary—one of two low tables by artist Silas Seandel in the room.

The design for this area coalesced by accident, after a gilt bronze Louis XV clock, which was to be a focal point, crashed to the ground. While it was being repaired, Pyne hung an artifact from a distinctly different era in its place: a portrait of Andy Warhol—the master of Pop himself—by the photographer Francesco Scavullo. And there, with Warholian impudence, it remains. Its placement was “a tipping point that made the room come alive,” Pyne recalls.

The juxtaposition of drastically different periods “imparts a liveliness,” she adds. It may also be inevitable: McMillen was founded in 1924 as a bastion of tradition; Pyne, by contrast, has “always been on the edge of things,” as she puts it. She grew up with the firm, in a sense—her mother, the acclaimed decorator Betty Sherrill, was its president for three decades, beginning in 1972. While Pyne “always loved rooms and decor,” she says, she pursued other professional

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: A stairwell features drawings by Dora Frost of British figures, including Francis Bacon and Stephen Spender; the runner is by Patterson Flynn Martin. A painted fiberglass sphere by artist Russell Crotty hangs in the foyer; the 18th-century bench is upholstered in a linen by Zoffany, the walls are stenciled, and the floor is sheathed in steel tiles. A print by Josef Albers hangs above a Louis XVI-style armchair in the drawing room; the sconce, one of four, was a 1970s commission by French decorator Henri Samuel, and the oak floor is stained purple-blue. **FACING PAGE:** The dining room’s table and chairs by Eric Chapeau are based on designs by Tommi Parzinger, the 1930s Paul Franki cabinet was bought at Rago, and the circa-1950 mirror is by FontanaArte; the chandelier dates from the 1830s, the wallpaper is by Gracie, and the rug is by V’Soske. See Resources.





A 1962 painting by John Wesley hangs in a stairway. ABOVE: A custom-made sofa upholstered in a fabric by Quadrille, tables by Eric Chapeau inspired by vintage Billy Haines pieces, and a floor lamp from Dennis Miller in the garden room. LEFT: Circa-1972 closet doors. Originally in designer John Dickinson's San Francisco apartment, were installed as cabinets in the garden room; rustic Chinese-style chairs, designed for a Billy Haines interior, surround a marble table from R.E. Steele Artiques; the chandelier is in the style of Diego Giacometti; the wallpaper is by Knowles & Christou; the curtains are of Larsen fabrics, and the floor is painted. See Resources.



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interests, writing fiction and teaching among them, before arriving at McMillen's door; she assumed the top job after her mother's death last spring. The family is now also represented by a third generation, Ann's daughter, Elizabeth Pyne, who runs the newly established McMillen Plus, a division geared toward younger clients.

In the case of this townhouse, its rooms are discrete: Almost none affords a view of another. “The challenge was to have continuity throughout,” Pyne says. She worked toward this in myriad ways—for example, by having all the floors stained a deep blue, inspired by a large painting of peacocks by John Wesley in an upstairs stairway. These exotic creatures became a subtle leitmotif through the house.

Rather than toning down the dining room's gilt-edge pillars, which seemed almost gaudy at first, she decided to “just have fun with it,” she says. The sparkly silver-and-gold geometric wallpaper and patterned chairs match the flash of the architectural elements.

While the jewel-tone library on the floor above is a place of almost hallucinatory color—“a nighttime room,” Pyne says—the room that sits lowest in the house, contiguous to its garden, is a place of pure daylight. The clients “wanted a garden room no one had ever seen before,” the designer says. The springboard for the room was a set of closet doors designed by San Francisco decorator John Dickinson that Pyne found at auction. She lined the walls with these, even creating new ones to match as needed. The effect is of an urban town square, a magic one, where the houses have mirrored windows and, thanks to an artfully stenciled floor, the ground is cobblestone.

What stitches the design of this residence together is a philosophy more than anything else. “I think there should be a sense of slight confrontation when you go into a room,” Pyne explains. Which, come to think of it, animates each and every one of these spaces. Only, it takes a while to see it. ■



The master bedroom's cast-metal bed is a custom design; the headboard and bed skirt are of a fabric by Lestève, and the canopy curtains are of a silk by Dedas that was embroidered by Penn & Fletcher and lined with a fabric by Stark; the mirrored bedside tables are from R.E. Steele Antiques; the lamps are by Christopher Spillmiller, and the custom-color wallpaper is by Gracie. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP:** A painting by Jean-Antoine Watteau, a sofa by Mattia Bonetti, and a Bague's sconce in the master bedroom. A photograph by Luika Lambrihangs in the master bath. See Resources.