

FANTASY ISLAND

A sprawling apartment in a legendary Fifth Avenue hotel becomes a family home that marries European decadence with American ease.

By Alexa Brazillan
Photographs by Christopher Sturman



In a pine-paneled room used for parties in a Manhattan apartment, a Turkish-style sofa by the interior designer Martin Brulé that he had upholstered in a custom-colored silk velvet from Dedar. The games table is Nelson Jansen, and the carpet is from Codinet Collection.



"IT HAS THE spirit of a loft," says the interior designer Martin Brülé, surveying the apartment that inhabits an entire floor of the Sherry-Netherland, the 38-story Jazz Age Fifth Avenue co-op and hotel overlooking Central Park at 59th Street. "The stereotype of a New York loft is that it's downtown with this artsy feeling, mismatched furniture. Well, this space has all those elements. It's just a completely dreamy version of that."

The Montreal-born Brülé, 38, was commissioned to do the apartment in 2021, a few years after he opened his namesake New York office, by a Latin American-born client with a family of five who works in a rarefied corner of the international jewelry business. Brülé has since transformed the 11,000 square feet, which once housed the hotel's barbershop, gym and several offices, into a wildly imaginative and distinctively uptown version of open-plan living. With vast spaces separated mainly by three monumental sets of custom-forged, nickel-plated steel pocket doors, its free-flowing layout is arrayed with finely crafted 18th- and 19th-century European antiques, Modernist furniture from the 1930s and '40s and a vivid pastiche of intensely colored velvets, silks and satins. The heart of the space is an airy, sophisticated sitting room that connects on the south side to a dining room suggestive of decadent late night suppers in postwar Paris, and an industrial-inflected kitchen. A sensuous lounge and screening room lead to a celestial primary suite and an adjoining boudoir on the north side.

For Brülé, who is known for subdued tones and disciplined geometries, involving a Tribeca loft within an iconic neo-Gothic edifice and outfitting it in a fever dream of color, texture and opulent fabrics was a change of direction. The client, with whom he traveled to galleries and antiques shops in France and Italy, wanted the furnishings to elicit "happy and bright" feelings — and to be exquisitely wrought. "I was open to do anything in the world," Brülé says.

One of his inspirations for the décor was a group of socialites and aesthetes who lived in Paris after World War II, among them the Cuban sugar heir and designer Emilio Terry and the Chilean collector Arturo Lopez-Willshaw, whose stylish younger lover, the Baron de Redd, restored the Baroque-era Hôtel Lambert on the Île Saint-Louis and later helped manage money for the Rolling Stones. They were omnivorous

and unconcerned with propriety — or the appearance of restraint. "There was a return to lavish living," says the designer. "They were trying to recreate 18th- and 19th-century excess. It was less about refinement and more about grandeur."

THOSE PIONEERS BRAZENLY mixed their messages and eras, and Brülé has absorbed this idea. In the sun-streaked sitting room, with floor-to-ceiling windows framing treetop views of the park, the entire suite of custom-designed upholstered furniture — down to the tufted sofa buttons made from silk embroidery thread from Samuel & Sons — has been dyed a dusty shade of gray-blue. It's a serene counterpoint to a huge, slashing 2020 abstract painting nearby in shades of violet, lavender and tangerine by the contemporary Swiss

artist Urs Fischer. On a neo-Classical Jean-Charles Moreux marble-top console sits an intricate white porcelain Meissen soup tureen decorated with cherubs that belonged to the owner's grandmother. A cast-bronze "Expansion" sculpture by the 1960s Nouveau Réalisme artist César is mounted on the wall behind.

In the dining room, the choices grow even more daring, with a pair of nine-foot-tall 1930s birdcages converted into planters filled with giant ferns and, against a mirrored surface, a banquette upholstered in royal blue silk moiré jacquard by Verasetta, the fourth-generation Loire-region weaving company. A pair of 1950s black lacquer dining tables and midnight blue velvet-upholstered chairs from Maison Jansen fold up and are light enough to be moved to accommodate a cocktail hour or the



Clockwise from above left: In the sitting room, a suite of Italian Empire furniture purchased from the antiques dealer Jean-Paul Beaujard, custom polished nickel doors in the split of 1920s Modernism and an Urs Fischer painting; in the primary suite, Codinat Collection carpet and an 1870s officers' daybed, also purchased from Jean-Paul Beaujard; in the kitchen, a custom stainless-steel island from Abimis, a Picasso plate and, in the background, Jacques Adnet chairs from 1946 upholstered with original Aubusson tapestry representing each sign of the zodiac; a bed, designed by Brülé in collaboration with Victoria & Son, inspired by the neo-Classical designs of Emilio Terry and Serge Roche. The fabric on the ceiling, walls and bed is Fortuny.

COURTESY, LARRY WATSON FOR WALL & DECOR; TOP: 18; MIDDLE: 20; BOTTOM: 21; 22: 23; 24: 25; 26: 27; 28: 29; 30: 31; 32: 33; 34: 35; 36: 37; 38: 39; 40: 41; 42: 43; 44: 45; 46: 47; 48: 49; 50: 51; 52: 53; 54: 55; 56: 57; 58: 59; 60: 61; 62: 63; 64: 65; 66: 67; 68: 69; 70: 71; 72: 73; 74: 75; 76: 77; 78: 79; 80: 81; 82: 83; 84: 85; 86: 87; 88: 89; 90: 91; 92: 93; 94: 95; 96: 97; 98: 99; 100: 101; 102: 103; 104: 105; 106: 107; 108: 109; 110: 111; 112: 113; 114: 115; 116: 117; 118: 119; 120: 121; 122: 123; 124: 125; 126: 127; 128: 129; 130: 131; 132: 133; 134: 135; 136: 137; 138: 139; 140: 141; 142: 143; 144: 145; 146: 147; 148: 149; 150: 151; 152: 153; 154: 155; 156: 157; 158: 159; 160: 161; 162: 163; 164: 165; 166: 167; 168: 169; 170: 171; 172: 173; 174: 175; 176: 177; 178: 179; 180: 181; 182: 183; 184: 185; 186: 187; 188: 189; 190: 191; 192: 193; 194: 195; 196: 197; 198: 199; 200: 201; 202: 203; 204: 205; 206: 207; 208: 209; 210: 211; 212: 213; 214: 215; 216: 217; 218: 219; 220: 221; 222: 223; 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boisterous impromptu dinner parties that the family often throws — made easier by access to room service from Harry Cipriani on the ground floor (another vestigial amenity of the building: twice-daily maid service).

The nearby kitchen stands in sober contrast to such ebullience. Clad in stainless-steel and oak paneling, its wet bar backsplash is a patchwork of large green-and-red Italian marble squares in a variety of textures — sandblasted, honed, leathered. A round stainless-steel table with a built-in Lazy Susan designed in the 1960s by the Italian photographer and furniture designer Willy Rizzo is surrounded by a set of 12 chairs, created in 1946 by Jacques Adnet, upholstered in Aubusson tapestries depicting the signs of the zodiac. A giant steel island by the Italian kitchen company Abimis had to be lifted by crane through the street-facing windows.

On the other side of the apartment, in the space that Brülé refers to as the nightclub room, his embrace of debauched glamour reaches its apotheosis. Paneled in pickled pine as a nod to the famed traditionalist Chicago architect David Adler, the long, narrow space is punctuated by Maison Jansen gueridons and card tables and adorned with tufted chaise longues, armchairs and a Turkish-style U-shaped built-in sofa — all fitted in trippy acid yellow custom-dyed silk velvet. Underfoot is wall-to-wall tiger-print wool carpet by the French company Codimat Collection. The rock crystal sconces are by the 184-year-old French lighting company Bagues, with silk shades custom-dyed to match the hue of the upholstery. A collection of bronze animals set with semiprecious stones made by the French antiques dealer Atha, whose 1970s Paris shop is said to have been a favorite of Yves Saint Laurent's, sit on wall-mounted pedestals above the built-in sofa in an alcove.

While the apartment is a paean to European design since the 1700s, Brülé also remembered the central dictum of the great American designers of the 20th century, including Billy Baldwin, Elsie de Wolfe and Frances Elkins: Elegance need not sacrifice ease. Instead of the stiff formality that sometimes pervades European interiors, a softness permeates the space — the custom furniture comes with lofty goose-down cushions; the screening room has a plush gray wool carpet and an oversize pillowy daybed; the tentlike primary bedroom is swathed in creamy printed Fortuny

cotton. "This apartment illustrates what I love about the history of decorative arts in this country," says Brülé. "Those American decorators created incredibly stylish rooms with taste and spirit — but they also understood the real meaning of comfort."

In the sitting room, a Caesar "Expansible" sculpture in bronze is installed above a neo-Baroque Jean-Charles Reveau marble-top console with 1970s Maison Jansen obelisks and an antique Meissen porcelain soup tureen. Opposite in the dining room, Brülé designed a custom Brian Quinn table in a Venetian marble inlaid with a velvet border to go with a 1990s table and chairs from Maison Jansen.

