



There is a certain moment that can later be recognized as a turning point. For New York designer Jed Johnson and architect Alan Wanzenberg, it arrived in 1991 when a couple who are prominent in New York's art world asked the partners to design their new apartment. "One of the most memorable moments in our career," recalls Wanzenberg, "was when we got the commission and our client said to us, 'My command to you is to exceed yourselves.'"

And indeed, the partners, who already have an established reputation for creating houses and interiors that whisper rather than shout, have outdone themselves. For these clients and their blue-chip twentieth-century art collection, Johnson and Wanzenberg have designed rooms in which elegant proportions, simple but exquisite detailing and quietly sumptuous materials conspire to seduce the most jaded sensibilities.

The apartment itself is small and intimately situated, with views of the treetops of Central Park and the towers of Fifth Avenue. The wife, who worked in close consultation with Johnson and Wanzenberg, would have preferred a more grandly proportioned apartment, but her husband didn't want to live in a place that felt cavernous. So in return for her acquiescence on the scale issue, she received her husband's promise

OPPOSITE: In keeping with their clients' 20th-century art collection, architect Alan Wanzenberg and designer Jed Johnson devised a sophisticated modernist setting for the Manhattan apartment. *Geschwister*, 1930, by Paul Klee hangs over a 1940s Jean Royère console.

ABOVE: "All our design ideas are displayed in the entrance gallery," says Wanzenberg. "It's the overture indicating things to come." Neoclassical Henri Jacob chairs merge with Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann sconces and Francis Bacon's *Study for Gerard Schuerman*, 1969.

LUMINOUS MODERNISM

A FLAWLESS MANHATTAN APARTMENT SETS OFF A TWENTIETH-CENTURY COLLECTION

ARCHITECTURE BY ALAN WANZENBERG, AIA INTERIOR DESIGN BY JED JOHNSON
TEXT BY PILAR VILADAS PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAIME ARDILES-ARCE





A 1920s Marion Dorn carpet anchors the living room, where 'Art Déco' furniture includes a shagreen-and-macassar-ebony cabinet by Jean-Michel Frank, on which rests Joseph Cornell's *Défense d'Afficher*, 1939. Juan Gris's *Verres sur une Table*, 1913-14, and Léger's *3 Figures*, 1921, flank the mirror. Above the cabinet is Miró's *Trois Femmes*, 1935, and to the left, Picasso's *Femme dans un Fauteuil*, 1939.



ABOVE: Picasso's 1938 *Femme aux Mains Jointes*, Giacometti's sculpture *Femme de Venise VII*, 1956, and Arp's *Torse et Nombrils*, 1924, frame the living room's view of Central Park. A circa 1925 Frank low table sits in front of an upholstered Ruhlmann armchair. Bowl is by Cartier.

not to interfere in the design issue.

She hired the partners not knowing if they could fulfill her vision. "The chemistry was right," she says. "I was immediately taken with them." Johnson describes her as "a real patron. She gave us a lot of inspiration. You always wanted to outdo yourself for her, but in the nicest way."

Johnson and Wanzenberg's work began with the rooms themselves, which were intended to serve as a backdrop for the clients' collection of paintings by such masters as Picasso,

LEFT: The satinwood paneling was continued into the library, where the fireplace is dominated by two Picassos—*Compotier, Bouteille, Pain sur une Table*, 1913, and *Portrait of a Woman*, 1944.



"Everything we did was intended not to compete with the art."



ABOVE: In the library a 1766 Louis XVI bureau plat stamped Philippe-Claude Montigny is joined by Léger's *Les Constructeurs*, 1949, Picasso's *Homme Debout de Face*, 1908, and Bugatti's 1915 *Walking Leopard*. Jean-Michel Frank low tables are complemented by a Frank table that has a hammered straw top, foreground.

Léger, Klee, Miró and Bacon. Wanzenberg explains that he repropo-
tioned the rooms and doorways to
make the ceilings appear higher, and
that certain design geometries, such
as the square—which appears in the
parquetry floors, the dining room's
parchment panels and the scalloped
friezes throughout the apart-
ment—were used to create unity without
excess. "The traditional elements of

base, frieze and cornice are there,"
explains project architect Alex Antonelli,
"but without applied ornament."

Mock-ups of paneling were made
and scrutinized carefully, and, with
the kind of precision and planning
that befit a military campaign, all
materials were procured prior to con-
struction "so there wouldn't be any
surprises," Wanzenberg says. "This
project gave us the opportunity to





OPPOSITE: "We wanted the wife's bath to be feminine yet still evoke the architectural rigor that's demonstrated elsewhere," says Wanzenberg. The partners installed a circa 1925 alabaster light fixture and a circa 1910 porcelain tub and pedestal sink; the 1940s satinwood X stool has a terry-cloth slipcover.

ABOVE: A detail of the master bedroom highlights the handwoven silk wallcovering of cabbage roses. Picasso's *Tête de Profil* is from 1924. The silver lamp with beaded-glass shade is by Ruhlmann.

work with a lot of the millwork shops, finishers, floor people and plasterers that we've used for years," he continues, "and to be fairly experimental about it this time. No one balked at the challenge."

The overall effect, one of luxurious minimalism, evokes the feeling of the modernist rooms of the 1920s and 30s. The materials—satinwood for the paneling in the entrance gallery and library, parchment and plaster with mother-of-pearl added for texture and iridescence—are flawlessly assembled and meticulously detailed. Slender metal casings frame all door

and window openings with a jeweler's precision. Draperies disappear into wall pockets, never betraying so much as a hint of hardware. The majority of the fabrics were handwoven by James Gould of Connecticut.

In decorating the apartment, Johnson's mission was not an easy one. "Everything we did was intended not to compete with the art," he explains. But their client wanted furnishings that reflected the era in which much of the art was produced, as well as older pieces that would provide a sense of both historical continuity

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and variety, as if the rooms had been filled with the accumulation of several generations' worth of treasures.

Johnson, assisted by Vance Burke, set about finding outstanding pieces by Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann, Diego Giacometti, Jean-Michel Frank and other designers from the Art Déco and Moderne movements. And he introduced the kind of Neoclassical pieces—such as a Louis XVI *bureau plat* and painted stools, four signed 1820s Henri Jacob chairs and some nineteenth-century Russian dining chairs—that inspired those twentieth-century designers and that blend so effortlessly with their creations.

Johnson's instinct for the right piece in the right place did not always produce instant results; for example, his client deliberated for several months before deciding to buy the prized Marion Dorn carpet that Johnson chose for the living room. "Jed is so quiet, but he's stubborn," she says affectionately. Recalling a visit to the *Marché aux Puces* in Paris, she describes Johnson "wading into this visual mess, finding something, and saying, 'We have to have this one.' He does not make visual errors."

Colors are, for the most part, neutral—in the "parchment" family, as Johnson would say. The exceptions to the rule can be found in the library, where the rich brown of upholstery and drapery fabrics is accented by bright red, and in the bedroom, where celadon underscores the room's sense of unalloyed 1930s glamour. The Ruhlmann-inspired bed is upholstered in silk satin, while a silk-and-linen jacquard in a stylized rose pattern was specially woven for the bedcover, walls and draperies. Although it is a French document fabric, "it looks very much like something Ruhlmann could have designed," Johnson says.

Sumptuous as the apartment is, it is also, like all the interiors Johnson and Wanzenberg design, user-friendly. "It doesn't shriek at you," says their client. "And comfort hasn't been sacrificed for design." □

Elsewhere in Italy, tourists steeped in the Latin classics from their earliest days as schoolboys were inevitably intrigued by the remnants of the imperial era. Grand tourists bought view paintings by such artists as Panini, Ghezzi, Vernet, van Lint, Joli and Ducros that show ruined classical arches, obelisks, columns and temples alongside more contemporary sights. Some of these views are imaginary, fantastic *capricci* that manage to encompass a variety of celebrated monuments without regard for topographical accuracy. Gaspard Vanvitelli sometimes went to the extreme, combining in a single painting the Bay of Naples, the Colosseum in Rome and the Temple of the Sibyl at Tivoli. Archaeological sites can also be seen in the backgrounds of canvases by Pompeo Batoni, the d'aristocrat portraitist of the day for visiting English gentlemen.

Once a grand tourist's leisurely progress through Italy had been completed, it was time to turn homeward. The hardiest travelers braved bad roads, bandits and pestilent inns to

and central European art. One traveler's evaluation of the "burlesque [of] Flemish painting" was typical: "Boors dancing, cattle, cocks and hens.... one can't help pitying the dull patience of the artist." Tourists reserved their highest admiration only for Italian art, with many stopping to examine the collection of Italian masterworks at Dresden that the elector of Saxony had purchased from the duke of Modena. Similarly, most travelers limited their acquisitions of paintings to Italy, although some tourists did purchase views of northern European cities by Canaletto's nephew Bernardo Bellotto, an accomplished *vedute* painter in his own right. Bellotto's views of Dresden, Munich, Vienna and Warsaw have much in common stylistically with the works of his famous Venetian uncle but are characterized by deep shadows and a cool, gray light very different from that of the south.

The age of the grand tour ended with the coming of the steam engine. By the middle of the nineteenth century, railroad tracks had been laid

The hardiest travelers braved bad roads and pestilent inns to return to England via Germany and the Low Countries.

return to England via Germany and the Low Countries, with an occasional few detouring through eastern Europe. On the way tourists would make the rounds of the principalities of the Holy Roman Empire, selecting from the sixty or so small courts that ruled Germany. Fresh faces were welcome in these small, insular states, and tourists were often received with great ceremony. The British diarist James Boswell was "absolutely electrified" by his reception, noting in his journal that "I live with princes, and a court is my home."

This warm welcome did not translate into an appreciation for northern

across the Continent. Travel became swift and easy, a matter of hours and days, not months and years. The gentry could suddenly visit Europe at will, and an elaborate, once-and-for-all journey became unnecessary. The tour's legacy remains strong, however, in the artistic inheritance it has left us. Remembrances of distant lands that helped inspire a new cosmopolitanism in eighteenth-century England, the paintings brought home by the grand tourists broaden our world too, opening doors to the tastes and the concerns of another time and providing us with vivid mementos of its splendors. □