

HOUSE TOUR

A Superchic Apartment That's Tougher Than It Looks

A two-bedroom New York home needed to be stylish enough for entertaining and hard-wearing enough for a young family



HIGH STYLE One of the expressions of glamour in this durable interior came in the form of luxurious light fixtures notably out of reach of a 7-year-old boy. **PHOTO:** ERIC PIASECKI/OTTO

By *Heidi Mitchell*

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I THINK WE'VE LOST our way a little as a society, building bigger and bigger homes," said New York interior designer Gideon Mendelson, who frequently works on 10,000-square-foot houses "where it's tough to make use of all that space for just the four residents." When confronted with a 2,000-square-foot apartment on Manhattan's West End Avenue (600 square feet smaller than the average newly constructed American house), he exercised his creative muscles in another way. For his clients, a couple and their 7-year-old son, he strove to salvage every possible square inch of the apartment. "Designing for the city is a lesson in reality," he said.

The design brief continued beyond maximizing square footage. "We wanted to be able to entertain but also live without worrying the apartment was too precious to stand up to real use," said the husband.

Coaxing spaces to do double duty—a hallway became a library; an awkward kitchen cutout a home office—bestowed upon the family more discrete areas than they had imagined the floor plan could yield. Many linear feet of hidden cabinetry cleared the floors of clutter. Adhering mostly to one color established a comely continuity that helped the two-bedroom apartment seem larger.

Deceptively luxe fabrics intended for outside use as well as subtly patterned dirt-disguising rugs granted the practicality a young boy requires without sacrificing the style guests appreciate. Custom furnishings built as much for performance as polish, plus a few glam expressions like a statement coffee table and large-scale artwork, made the space suitable for both sophisticated soirees and a young clan living its untidy everyday life.

Blue Crush

Throughout a New York City apartment, various shades of blue act as a visual anchor. "Having a cohesive palette helps make an apartment feel like one connected design and enhances the sense of spaciousness," said the home's interior designer, Gideon Mendelson. In the living room, Farrow & Ball's Skylight paint echoes the expansive sky and river vistas the large windows afford. "Many apartments work with the colors of nearby buildings, but the sky was a



PHOTO: ERIC PIASECKI/OTTO

forgiving of stains and spills,” said Mr. Mendelson.

Able Table

The owners wanted an eat-in kitchen that could host family meals and act as a space where their son “could play and draw and do crafts,” said the husband. The breakfast nook doesn’t sacrifice style at the expense of endurance, however—no dirt-masking patterns or diner-style vinyl appear here. Easily wiped

Holland & Sherry faux leather upholsters the seat cushions, Eames molded-plastic classic chairs defy stains and the Eero Saarinen-style table base with custom Caesarstone top “is nearly indestructible,” said Mr. Mendelson. The pendant, from Restoration Hardware, is intentionally midmarket “because you don’t want slime on a vintage Italian piece,” said the designer, a family man who speaks from experience. A photograph, “Yuanmingyuan Lu, 2008,” by Canadian photographer Greg Girard, reinforces the home’s color scheme with its saturated blues and greens.



PHOTO: ERIC PIASECKI/OTTO

Book Passage

The only access to the master and child’s bedrooms is through a hallway. “So why not have an experience as you pass through spaces?” Mr. Mendelson said. His clients agreed, and they transformed that transitional space into a vestibule library made dramatic with Benjamin Moore’s Van Deusen Blu from floor to ceiling. Bonus: the spines of the 200-plus books pop against the glamorous high-gloss paint. On the ceiling, Jenna Lewis’s marbled wallpaper alludes to the inside of book covers, and a vintage lighting fixture from Blackman Cruz emits a moody glow. “Gideon took that space and made it into a jewel box,” said the owner. Similarly, an immovable gas meter meant a small crook of the kitchen (not shown) couldn’t be incorporated into the



PHOTO: ERIC PIASECKI/OTTO

room's main space. Mr. Mendelson's solution: Hide the meter in hanging wood-and-glass cabinets and install a minimalist office in the otherwise-dead shape. "In these pass-through spaces, I try to take some risks," he said.

Soft Shuffle



PHOTO: ERIC PIASECKI/OTTO

"The forms here in the master bedroom are pretty masculine, and the entire home is relatively handsome, so I chose a color analogous to blue to create a softer moment here," said Mr. Mendelson, referring to the color violet, which falls alongside blue on the color wheel (as opposed to across the wheel, where complementary colors are found). Holland & Sherry curtains, a Casa del Bianco embroidered duvet cover and Rogers & Goffigon grass cloth that wraps the headboard further cushion the space with texture. Custom walnut nightstands are inlaid with antique mirrors, making them impervious to water stains while also reflecting light from the Vaughan brass sconces above. "Light bouncing around a room adds visual interests and depth," Mr. Mendelson said.

Ship Shape



PHOTO: ERIC PIASECKI/OTTO

Mr. Mendelson built the son's bedroom like a yacht interior. He pushed a daybed with a pullout trundle against the wall, then straddled it with custom-built shelving to maximize the play area on the floor. Sconces—rather than lamps—by Schoolhouse Electric leave more floor and surface space as well. Azure Duralee fabric clads the wall, headboard and footboard of the daybed. "It's soft on a 7-year-old's head. Plus, when he's older, he can rotate a queen-sized bed and the fabric and millwork will act as a headboard," the designer noted. A stripe of Benjamin Moore Wasabi paint (green is blue's other analogous color) adds a bit of whimsy, as do pony-sided P'Kolino chairs.