

OCTOBER 2008

# House Beautiful

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“The bedroom is like a walk through a market in India—the colors, textures, the incredible abundance. It’s like you bought an armful of beautiful saris and just layered them on the bed.”

ERIC COHLER





"The Fischer Building clock [seen from the master bedroom window] is one of four city clocks visible from the apartment, if you can believe it," says Cohler, "and one of the things that makes living here so exciting, and surreal." Holland & Sherry's Glacier wool satin was used for the curtains and to upholster the wall behind the bed, opposite. The headboard is covered in Lee Jofa's Lela Embroidery in Cocoa. At the foot are twin Knoll stools. Lamps are by Christopher Spitzmiller. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES.



Where other people see a bookcase light, Cohler sees a link to the past. Based on a model from the turn of the last century, "that oil-can light is the design equivalent of comfort food." The painting in the entrance hall is by Mark Humphrey. OPPOSITE: The Comerford Hennessy dining table has maple butterfly joints and a "live" edge in the style of George Nakashima. The walnut-veneer chairs are re-editions of a 1958 Norman Cherner classic. Kitchen cabinetry is ebonized rift-cut cherry.



**CHRISTOPHER PETKANAS: This had to be one of your biggest decorating challenges yet. All these walls of curved glass!**

**ERIC COHLER:** It was a real challenge, yes, working with an undulating glass facade and lack of symmetry. The space is like a biomorphic pod for living. Most of the walls that are flat and form right angles are on the inside. **You're known for traditional rooms with a modern bite. They're relaxed, fresh, crisp—the opposite of fussy. But in this Manhattan apartment you seem to have ramped up the modern with a mix of contemporary furniture with Gustavian and Swedish antiques.**

Despite my shift in emphasis here, if I'm about one thing it's prolonging the past. History is my balm. You know, even the edgiest designers go to the Louvre and Winterthur for inspiration. Without those references we'd be in a desert. Nobody would be able to create.

**Did your clients want this mix?**

Antiques were something they were very nervous about including. At the beginning they thought everything should be up-to-the-minute. They also felt that since they were embarking on this fresh new life, they should shed everything they owned. But shedding was too expensive, and I was able to show them how the lithe, uncomplicated lines of Gustavian furniture could be elegantly incorporated into this very modern setting. The Swedish things are also great with contemporary furniture. Look how well they get along with the sectional in the living room.

**And behind the sectional—look how well that neoclassical-style console they brought from their old place looks with two Gustavian chairs you bought. If ever there was an argument for not shedding everything...**

There you go!

**The living room, dining area, and kitchen are one big open space, almost like a loft. How did you deal with that?**

When I design I think of an Italian streetscape. You've got the public piazza—here the living-cooking-eating space—and the private houses—the bedrooms—off that. We reconfigured the space to make it more

suitable for family living. The clients have three children—a son in high school and two daughters in college. Originally there were only two bedrooms, now there are three.

**The views from the living room are amazing.**

**Did they influence the furniture plan?**

Definitely. They're why I sited the main sitting area in the middle of the room, to free up the views. But all the chairs are light enough that you can just pull them up to the windows and take in the panorama. With a glass of wine and the newspaper you're all set.



**Did the views help decide anything else?**

The curtains. We hung plain and simple sheers on a flexible track screwed directly into the ceiling. You know the curtains that wrap hospital beds? That was my model. They're a great solution when you don't want a lot of heavy, cumbersome hardware, when you just want the fabric to float.

**With the horizontal stripe you used, I doubt anyone will ever think 'hospital.' It's so dressy and sophisticated. Still, I was a little surprised that you brought the curtains right into the kitchen. That's really brave of you.**

They're too far from the cooktop to get greasy, if that's what you worried about. Besides, I wanted to soften the room up.

The other thing is that the light can be very intense here. I needed a scrim to tame it.

**I never saw this place before you did it, but I can imagine it must have been kind of chilly.**

Icy was more like it. A sea of Sheetrock.

**How did you warm it up?**

By creating a transition between the entrance hall and big common area. Originally you just walked in and the whole place practically hit you at once. No surprises, no feeling of compression and release that moving through an entry should give you. So we lowered the ceiling in the hall, added paneling and bookcases in limed oak, and hung a lot of their wonderful modern art collection.

**Your palette of neutrals, spice colors, and jewel tones—that's a combination you don't see every day.**

The idea was to have a monochromatic background, then bring the colors of the New York night inside—the red, green, and amber of a spotlight, the haunting blue glow of a TV seen through a window two blocks away. They're colors with soul. The violet light that washes through the apartment at the end of the day makes them sparkle like an illuminated manuscript.

**Every lamp in this apartment is a classic gourd lamp. What's the addiction?**

I put at least one in every job I do. They're one of the most sensual, life-affirming forms there is, like an egg. And they have this chameleon quality that goes across different periods and styles. These are the finest quality ones, by Christopher Spitzmiller. But Visual Comfort makes fantastic well-priced gourd lamps. Target does them, too. I know they're a bit overexposed, but I don't care.

**That's so un-decoratory of you.** I really don't think it matters. You go home, you close the door, you love your overexposed gourd lamp, you're happy.

**In any case, classics are supposed to be bulletproof.**

Right. Ten years from now this apartment will still be in business.

PRODUCED BY DORETTA SPERDUTO

To avoid blocking the sensational city views, furniture in the living room—including Gustavian chairs covered in inky mohair velvet—steers well clear of the floor-to-ceiling windows. OPPOSITE: Cohler paired two Gustavian chairs covered in Peter Fasano's Delicata in Malt with the owners' neoclassical-style console from Niermann Weeks; they share a motif of interlocking circles. The gourd lamps are by Christopher Spitzmiller.



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Interior design by  
ERIC COHLER

Interview by  
CHRISTOPHER  
PETKANAS

Photographs by  
JULIAN WASS

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"I'm a recent convert to sectionals," says designer Eric Cohler, who built the main sitting area in the living room of a Manhattan apartment around an L-shaped model he designed (the longer side is shown). "Sectionals are just so accommodating. The owners read here, the son watches TV, two huge Labs nap—all at the same time. Everybody's happy." The sofa's Torino velvet is from Yoma Textiles. The pillows came from the clients' previous apartment. The coffee table is by Roman Thomas. Curtain fabric is Vista in Beeswax by Pollack.





