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ROOTED

Interior designer Eric Cohler,
home at last, in the coziest of
Manhattan apartments

Interior design by
ERIC COHLER

Interview by
DOUGLAS BRENNER

Photographs by
JONNY VALIANT



To give his small dining room luxurious warmth, Eric Cohler covered Gustavian chairs in Edelman Chocolate suede, painted the walls Farrow & Ball Eating Room Red, and covered the ceiling in Lee Jofa tea paper. OPPOSITE: A santo figure mingles with an Alex Katz portrait and a Han dynasty camel.



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

- ABILITY TO FIND JOY IN LIFE
- DOESN'T TAKE THINGS TOO PERSONALLY
- IDEALISTIC

WHAT THE COLORS SAY

With an idealistic nature and keen awareness of people, places, and things, this person has the power to change the world if they choose to. They strengthen their spirit by helping others realize their potential. -Kate Smith

DOUGLAS BRENNER: I've seen that little camel statue in other apartments you've done for yourself. Does it symbolize a nomadic life?

ERIC COHLER: I'm a Bedouin at heart. And not just because I'm always traveling. Every time my lease is up, I decide I have to reinvent myself, so I move every two years. The camel and I saddle up, and off we go. I just feel revitalized when I move. It's always a mess, but this move was the worst I've ever made. I rented it off the Internet, sight unseen, while I was on a business trip. Never, ever do that! For the first year, I stayed in my old apartment because I didn't know what to do with this one. It needed lots of love. The spaces are really tight. In only 800-and-some square feet, there's a dining room, two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen, a bathroom, and lots of staircase—it's a duplex. I just didn't know how to make these tiny rooms feel comfortable. But once I slept there the first night, I decided I had never been more comfortable in my life.

So, do you feel you've reinvented yourself here?

My last apartment was starkly modern and crisp. This place is in an 1861 row house that's barely 11 feet wide—it was never meant to be grand. I've always lived in very large apartments or houses—I've been spoiled by space. I didn't know how to live in a small space, but now I wouldn't live in a large space ever again. In fact, I hardly use my dining room. People don't need as much space as they think they do. We have too much stuff. Edit, edit, edit! I've started counseling clients, 'Smaller is better—but make it more luxurious.' Small, luxurious touches make you feel cosseted.

The perfect Pullman car.

Exactly. I had to do something, though, about the low ceilings—only seven feet in the bedroom I turned into a dressing room/study. They felt oppressive. I tried to lift them up by adding crown moldings and papering or painting each ceiling in a contrasting texture or color. Except in the living room—I left that one landlord-white.

The dressing room ceiling is fantastic. Where did you get the idea for the trompe l'oeil paneling? It makes you forget how small the room is.

It's based on a Jean-Michel Frank interior for the Maison Guerlain in Paris. I had to create a dressing room because my clothes needed

them look back. So I'm drawn to portraits and human figures. I feel that I'm surrounded by friends, and those friends soon become family. And that's the way I am in real life—I collect friends and family. If I could have any other job, I would like to be the curator of a museum collection. I enjoy making still lifes of art and objects that speak to me—vignettes that mix high and low, old and contemporary. And I curate my clients' lives. Which isn't to say I don't like retreating to my own space.

Are there certain colors here that express your personality?

The chocolate brown and the blue in the bedroom—that's the only place here where I have these colors. They make me feel grounded. This blue reminds me of a day after it's rained, right before the sun comes out, when the ocean is so beautiful. In the rest of the apartment I went more for blacks, grays, and shades of yellow—with a little red thrown in for punch. It could have been a discordant mix. Most clients would not have let me do this. I'm not sure I understood what I was doing, but I think it went somewhere wonderful, and I'm really thrilled with the way it came out. This was my ultimate design lab.

Still, weren't you going back to tradition in painting your dining room that 19th-century 'Eating Room Red'?

I didn't start out wanting a red dining room. I was playing around with colors, and I just thought this *sang de boeuf* would make the room



feel larger in the evening. It shines with candlelight, the silver tea paper on the ceiling, and the reflective gloss on the floor. I usually do not like high-gloss floors, but these came this way, and I said, 'It's OK, I'll just deal with it.' I've learned to accept surface flaws and architectural flaws. No interior is perfect—and I'm accepting of that for the first time in my life. I used to be so hyper, so type A. People thought I drank too much coffee, but I've never had a cup of coffee in my life. It's really calmed me down, this apartment. I'm more of an A—now.

What kind of art attracts you?

I love looking at people and I like having

more space than I had. The stacked shirts are pure Jay Gatsby, only I don't want to be shot in a pool. I just love clothes. I like the fact that one day you can be really Ivy League, and the next day you can be downtown bad-boy. Clothes are costume, and what I do for a living, basically, is clothe naked rooms. For me, that's a lot of fun. I had to purge my clothes when I moved. I gave away more than half to a thrift store and to friends. This apartment is basically a glorified closet and a place to put my art.

PRODUCED BY DORETTA SPERDUTO

ABOVE: In the hallway, Cehler added graphic moldings in Farrow & Ball Off-Black to jibe with Fornasetti Tema e Variazioni wallpaper from Cole & Son. OPPOSITE: The living room's ensemble of a Louis XVI armchair, a 1950s Jacques Adnet floor lamp, a Nell Blaine painting, a Cehler sofa in Donghia angora, and an Irish Georgian stool creates a relaxed mix of antique and modern. Walls are painted Sudberry Yellow by Farrow & Ball, cut with 50% Benjamin Moore Simply White.

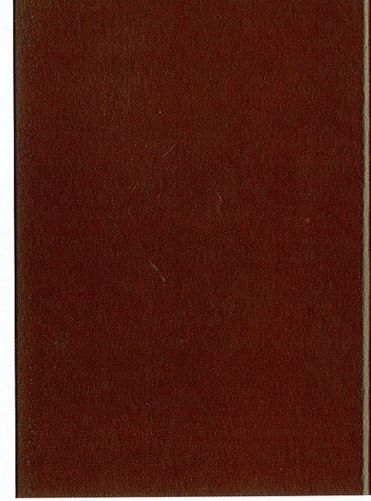
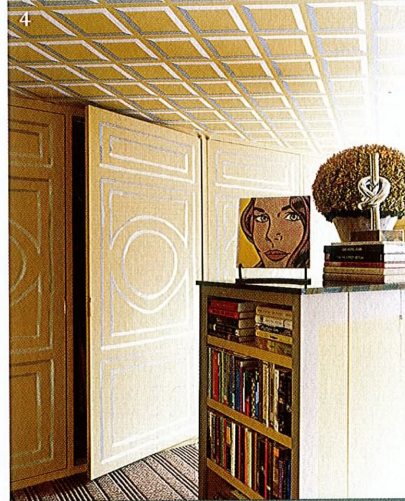
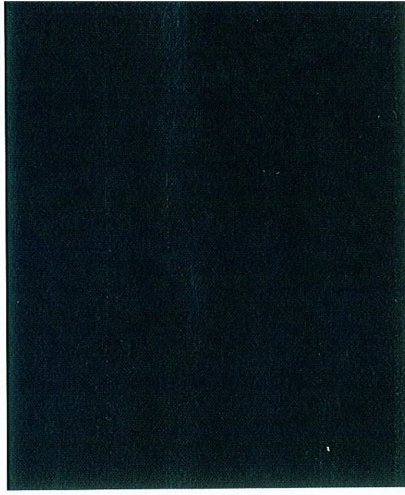
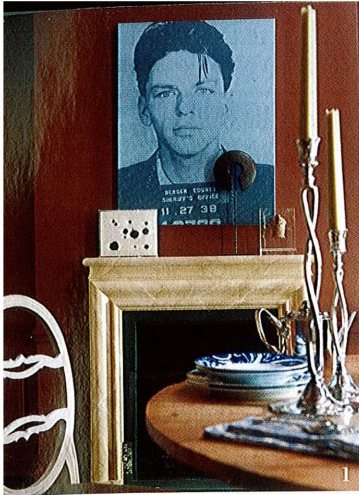


FIRST IMPRESSIONS

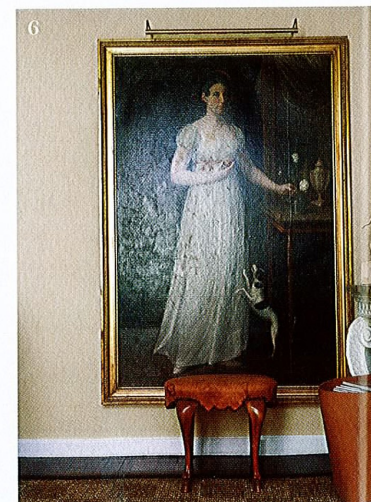
- ENJOYS LIFE FULLY
- PROBABLY FIT AND IN GOOD HEALTH
- IS INSPIRING TO OTHERS

WHAT THE COLORS SAY

This person inspires by getting results where others have failed. The road to success isn't without a few bumps, but they rebound quickly, remain positive, and celebrate the journey.
—Kate Smith



1. Russell Young's *Frank Sinatra* scans the dining room. The faux-marble mantel was installed by Mario Buatta 25 years ago when he decorated the apartment for Cohler's landlord. 2. Both the Threads linen on the living room chairs and the Eric Cohler Bosphorus print of the curtains come from Lee Jofa. 3 & 4. The sunny dressing room has a ceiling papered in Cole & Son's Pompeian and trompe l'oeil paneling by Tim Brown Studios. 5. Wallpaper lines the bathroom with books. 6. The lady in an 1820 Danish portrait seems to perch on a stool by Frances Elkins. OPPOSITE: This 3-D still life atop a 1920s William Kent-style console includes a midcentury plaster maquette, a Picasso etching, and a sketch from a junk shop. Below the table is a 1958 John Piper painting. "I just like it down there, the fact that it's sort of peeking out at you," Cohler says. "It's like the wild lining inside a plain jacket. It also covers an ugly outlet."





“If I could have any other job, I’d be a curator. I enjoy mixing art and objects, high and low. I curate my clients’ lives.”

ERIC COHLER



In the bedroom, a papier-mâché buck head hangs out with movie-star photos, a Ming tomb figure, and a Renaissance etching. Arrowroot grasscloth in Chocolate by Phillip Jeffries spins an earthy cocoon. OPPOSITE: Custom-painted lampshades echo the vibrant suzani throw on the bed: “My ode to Matisse,” says Cohler. The suede-covered headboard is Cohler’s own design. The ceiling is Phillip Jeffries Sapporo Linen wallpaper in Blue. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES

