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In the living room of a Park Avenue apartment that was designed by Brian J. McCarthy and renovated by the architect John B. Murray, the sofa, in an Old World Weavers fabric, is topped with a pillow made from a Dior scarf, and a pair of armchairs are in a Christopher Hyland silk. The vintage chair (right) is by André Arbus, the cocktail table is by Ateliers Brugier, the curtains are of a Macondo Silks silk taffeta, and the artwork is by Emil Nolde.

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ACID TEST

An art-loving California couple turn a classic Park Avenue apartment into an electric pied-à-terre with the help of designer Brian J. McCarthy.

The dining room's custom table has a patinated-bronze base by Patrice Dangel and a glass top with a gilded edge from Stephen Cavallo/Mirror Fair. The custom dining chairs are in an Atelier Textiles de Prestige fabric, the pendant is by Fortuny, and the circa-1980 rock crystal-and-bronze table lamp by Robert Goossens, one of a pair, is from Liz O'Brien.



THE CLASSIC UPPER EAST SIDE New York interiors of the 1980s hold a vivid place in our collective memory: They were spectacularly gilded, arrayed with 18th-century antiques, and layered in lush patterns. But at the same moment in time, an entirely different—and perhaps inadequately appreciated—aesthetic was taking shape 2,500 miles west in the homes of a generation of wealthy and discreet Southern Californians.

The Holmby Hills drawing rooms of Betsy Bloomingdale and the interiors of Sunnylands, Walter and Leonore Annenberg's estate in Rancho Mirage, were sun-splashed and elegant, playful and low-slung. There were pops of hot color—lime, aqua, lemon—and nods to Hollywood Regency style in homes that were as welcoming as they were soigné.

It is precisely such a spirit that infuses this art-filled Manhattan pied-à-terre. And no wonder: The owners are a couple who have spent most of their lives in Los Angeles mingling with pillars of the region's old guard, including Ronald and Nancy Reagan. "They're very international, but there is something quite California about them. They're willing to take chances," says designer Brian J. McCarthy, who has worked with the pair for more than 15 years and also designed their capacious main home in Los Angeles.

Although the couple, who have enjoyed high-flying careers in diplomatic and legal circles, spend significant time in New York—they serve on a slew of charity boards—they had never before owned an apartment in the city. "We looked around, casually, for years, but we could never find anything quite right," says the wife, who concedes that it was she who pushed the issue, while her husband was content to be taken care of by the staff at the Carlyle Hotel during their frequent visits.

But McCarthy, too, was keen to help them find an East Coast nest, one that would translate their genteel yet bold version of Los Angeles culture into a Manhattan context. He poked around a bit with a real estate agent, then rang them up the moment he was shown the 3,000-square-foot, three-bedroom apartment on Park Avenue. It had faux-classical columns and lots of dark wood paneling,

and it needed to be reconfigured and gutted, but the light was incomparable: three exposures and unobstructed views. "Seeing the sun is incredibly important when you've grown up with it," the wife says.

With architect John B. Murray, McCarthy reimagined the space by giving it an almost loftlike openness. Now, a cozy entry opens to a rotunda with black-and-white-marble floors. The plaster sconces are by Parisian sculptor Philippe Anthonioz, who collaborated with Diego Giacometti on the Musée Picasso. Leading from the rotunda on either side are the public rooms, with carefully chosen furnishings that convey a sense of wit and a highly refined eye.

Some of the furniture in the apartment was chosen on buying trips abroad that the couple took with McCarthy; in other cases, the homeowners, who travel the world constantly, simply fell in love with something and had it shipped back. "Brian would just laugh and say,



ABOVE: In the sitting room adjacent to the master bedroom, the Venetian plaster walls were hand-painted by Mark Giglio in a pattern inspired by Matisse's cut-outs. The custom sofa in a Zimmer + Rohde fabric is topped with pillows in a Borderline cotton paisley, the ottoman is covered in a J. Samuel wool, and the circa-1750 mirror is from R. Louis Boffarding Decorative & Fine Art. The Josef Frank-style candlestick lamp is from Svenskt Tenn, the swing-arm lamp is by Ann-Morris, Inc., and the custom abaca rug is by Beauvais Carpets.



The kitchen's custom fiberglass table is by Mongiardo Studio, the stove and hood are by La Cornue, the custom rope pendants are by Jacqueline Morabito, and the ceiling is in a custom Donald Kaufman Color paint. **OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** In the living room, a Mattia Bonetti Congo chair from David Gill Gallery pulls up to a 1940s Marc du Plantier desk from Bernd Goeckler; the artwork over the sofa is by Anselm Kiefer. A Louis Cane console in the dining room is topped with Serge Roche obelisks. In the rotunda, the artwork is by Christian Bérard.



The master bedroom's side table is by Hervé Van der Straeten, and the sconce is by Ann-Morris, Inc. **RIGHT, FROM TOP:** The Gazelle console is by W.P. Sullivan, and the vintage Kerstin Hörlin-Holmquist chair is in a Hosoo fabric. The dressing room's pendant is from a Paris flea market, and the Roman shade is in a Macondo Silks fabric. An Alberto Giacometti sculpture sits atop an antique Italian console in the living room; the barware is by Christofle.



“We’ll make it work,” the wife says.

In the living room, a small Diego Giacometti table that was once a minor player in the couple’s L.A. house now takes center stage. A 19th-century console the couple spied on a trip to Rome commands a wall; above it hangs a simple convex mirror of polished brass by the artist and gallerist Jacques Hervouet.

Meanwhile, the dining room’s tiered Fortuny pendant is endlessly reflected in the mirrored and lacquered walls. Throughout the apartment, the overall effect is of a piece with the building’s origins in the late 1920s. “It was a very glamorous time,” the wife observes, “and we wanted to celebrate that.”

But shocks of acid color hint at the couple’s unmistakably modern Southern California brio. It took a number of tries to get the pink silk taffeta floor-to-ceiling

curtains in the living room and adjoining study just the right shade of fuchsia. “In the end,” says the wife, “I sent Brian a piece of ribbon.”

Even the kitchen—generally a neutral zone—is playful and quirky, with an invigorating palette. Both the ceiling and the small, round fiberglass table are in a sunny canary yellow, while the La Cornue stove and matching vent hood are a vibrant baby blue. “It is just magnificent to sit in here in the morning with our coffee and the newspapers,” the wife says.

To McCarthy’s delight, the apartment achieves the delicate balance he set out to create: an alchemic blend of airy West Coast panache with a dash of Hollywood glamour and a generous helping of grand prewar elegance. “You just get happy when you walk in here,” he says. “Essentially, that’s what they wanted most.” ■



The custom cabinetry in the wife’s bathroom is fitted with P.E. Guerin hardware, the circa-1920 French sconces are from Galerie Bazin, and the Murano pendant is from Regan & Smith Antiques. For details, see Resources.