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Brian McCarthy's Manhattan living room showcases a collection of 18th- and 19th-century antiques, including a Louis XVI swivel desk chair pulled up to a mahogany bureau plat of the same period and a French Empire chair, attributed to Jacob, from Paris dealer Jean Wanecq. See Resources.

# FEET FIRST

INTERIOR DESIGNER BRIAN J. MCCARTHY HAS FURNISHED HIS URBANE MANHATTAN HOME WITH AN ARTFUL MENAGERIE OF GOLDEN PAWS, IRON CLAWS, AND ORMOLU HOOVES

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## BRIAN MCCARTHY HAS A THING FOR FEET.

Lion paws, bird claws, horse hooves: Name the pedal extremity and chances are the strapping young designer has one tucked somewhere in the elegant rooms of his prewar apartment in midtown Manhattan. That includes a quartet of Green Giant-sized Roman marble feet picked up at an antiques shop on the Côte d'Azur.

"I have no idea how I ended up with so many," McCarthy says of the growing assortment of footed furniture and objets d'art. His haul ranges from a taloned Empire jardiniere to a Régence table whose graceful black-lacquered legs terminate in gilt-bronze sabots that bring to mind the golden hooves of Djali, the dancing goat in *Notre-Dame de Paris*, Victor Hugo's tale of a bell-ringing hunchback. The designer, however, quickly disabuses visitors of the notion that there's anything remotely literary about this podiatrist's daydream. Nor is he betraying some secret fetish. Playing footsie is just a collecting fluke. And a spatially enhancing one at that. "Feet help make the inanimate animate," he says as Babka, his West Highland white terrier, pads into striking distance of the ferocious paws of a French Empire chair probably made by Jacob. "They add a life force."





Facing page, from left: McCarthy in his living room. A Roman marble foot sits atop a 19th-century Japanese table. This page, clockwise from top left: A 1940s Louis XV-style chair by Jansen and a French Empire daybed in the guest room. Paintings by Chilean artist Isabel Klotz in the entrance hall. Empire-style armchairs surround a mahogany dining table.



Like his footed finds, the apartment came into McCarthy's possession in a roundabout way. "I used to live across the street and look at it from my windows, wondering why no lights were ever on," says the designer, a former Parish-Hadley wunderkind who struck out on his own in 1991. Two years ago, the flat went on the market, and McCarthy, who had just jetted off to Arizona for a well-deserved vacation, headed back to New York and made an offer that could not be refused. A flick of a light switch later, he was checking out his new digs, a two-bedroom condominium enriched with applied-panel moldings, 10½-foot ceilings, and gleaming oak parquet floors in a 1921 high-rise created by Warren & Wetmore, the co-architects of Grand Central Terminal. (Once dubbed "a rental building to the stars," it has been home to Barbara Walters, society arbiter Earl Blackwell, and Anita Loos, the author of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*.) Best of all, there were no suspicious water stains. "Every place I've had in New York has leaked," says McCarthy, finally blissfully free of creeping damp.

Filling the rooms was a cinch, given their owner's discerning eye and the apartment's Francophile details, which McCarthy says remind him of the neoclassical surrounds of the Frick Collection in New York, where he recently decorated a VIP members lounge. In fact, if it wasn't for dining-room views of the Modernist white-marble shaft of Edward Durell Stone and Emery Roth's General Motors Building and plain-Jane fire escapes, you'd think you were in Paris, in the *hôtel particulier* of a much-traveled connoisseur with unerring taste in antiques. Right description, different continent.

Though McCarthy's taste was more eclectic when he labored at the side of freewheeling design doyen Albert Hadley, he's now gravitating to the kind of broad-shouldered dark-wood furniture that would have won the approval of Bill Blass: Regency tables, Restauration chairs, a Gustavian center table. One of his prizes is a Percier and Fontaine-style klismos chair that Frederick P. Victoria made for the fashion king. "I'm zeroing in on stronger forms. Line is really important; so are profile and silhouette," McCarthy says. "Basically I like gutsy furniture." For instance, around the dining table (it has paws, natch) stand eight stolid mahogany chairs clad in rosy leather (seven of which are copies made to match the 19th-century original). And scattered here and there, amid contemporary Latin American paintings and subtle bits of the furrier's art ("I'm a fur nut," says the designer, who has a top-secret Canadian source for pelts he's had transformed into rugs), is star-quality bric-a-brac, like a big bronze monkey once owned by legendary dealer Garrick Stephenson.

"It's the same cast of characters from my old place, but everything I own took on a new life here," says McCarthy, still awed by the gracious flow of space. (Credit Whitney Warren and Charles Wetmore for lining up the windows and doors to maximize light and views, an old architectural trick known as *enfilade*.) "There isn't so much that your eye can't rest, but this place is just large enough to really see things." Occasionally, it seems, for the first time. "People will look at something I've had for years and ask, 'When did you buy that?'"

Don't let the major-league paintings and rich ormolu give the wrong impression. Get McCarthy talking about great design and he admits to being an admirer of Sears catalogue houses of the early 1900s, bungalows for budget-conscious suburbanites that were "compact but beautifully conceived—and a lot better thought out than many houses built today," he says. French decorator Jacques Garcia's taxidermy-filled *Château du Champ de Bataille* in Normandy ranks high in his pantheon of chic, but so does the house that little Natalie Wood asks Santa Claus for in *Miracle on 34th Street*. Now McCarthy's got another perfect place to add to the list. And he created it himself. ■



The table at the foot of McCarthy's bed is 18th-century Swedish; the bedding is by Schweitzer Linens. McCarthy designed the side table after a Chinese Chippendale original; the painted Régence chair is upholstered in a striped Clarence House silk. See Resources.