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In the New York living room of Nurit and Rick Amdur, designer Brian J. McCarthy arrayed custom-made pieces by Jonas around a James Most cocktail table from Liz O'Brien; a Giant fabric covers the sofa, and the armchair is upholstered in a Toyne Sellers plaid. The large paintings are by Yehudit Levin (left) and Fima; the teak-and-bronze commode by Louis Cane and the Beauvais Carpets rug were custom made. For details see Sources.

THE PERFECT FIT

DESIGNER
BRIAN J. MCCARTHY
CONJURES A MAGICAL
MIX AT A COUPLE'S
APARTMENT IN
MANHATTAN'S
HISTORIC APTHORP
BUILDING

TEXT BY JULIE BELCOVE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANCESCO LAGNESI

A collection of vintage pieces by Fulper Pottery top a cabinet custom made by MHG Studio.



For years, Nurit Amdur kept a decorating-inspiration file, diligently filled with clippings from design magazines. "I would cut out images of what I liked—and didn't like," says the Israeli-born New Yorker. One of the pictures she saved was of a small but beautiful bathroom. What intrigued her was the designer's innovative treatment of the large window: He'd used an opaque white glass that provided both privacy and light, and then hung a round mirror smack-dab on top of it, as if it were a wall. The unexpected choice struck Nurit as brilliant: "I thought, One day I'll call this guy!"

That day came in 2013. After living on the Upper East Side for some 40 years, Nurit and her husband, Rick, had sold the toy business they cofounded, Alex Brands, and decided to follow numerous friends who'd migrated across Central Park to the Upper West Side. They bought an apartment in the Apthorp, an Italianate prewar gem built around an interior courtyard. Nurit pulled the bathroom shot from her file and emailed the designer responsible, Brian J. McCarthy, whose résumé includes a stint at Parish-Hadley Associates, the storied motherhood of American decorating. McCarthy promptly dropped off his book *Luminous Interiors* before the couple left for Tel Aviv, where they have another home.

Paging through the monograph, Nurit hesitated, finding the residences beautiful but grander than what she envisioned. Yet when she spoke to McCarthy by phone, she was impressed by his recommendations for gently tweaking the architecture—and her imagined layout—while preserving the period details. "He was thinking ahead," she says, "rather than saying, 'How do we solve a problem after we've created that problem?'"

For his part, McCarthy says that "it was love at first sight" with the apartment: "Honestly, I would have been heartbroken if I hadn't gotten the job." When McCarthy initially saw the place, it had largely been gutted, but he instantly had a feel for its exceptional light. The residence benefits from multiple exposures, including open views with direct sun as well as windows on the courtyard that get soft, reflected light.

One of McCarthy's first steps was a meticulous restoration of original details—the plasterwork on walls and ceilings, the paneling in the master bedroom, the mosaic floor in the front gallery turned dining area. That process required patience: Scraping a century's worth of paint from the bedroom's spectacular coffered ceiling took a year.

Then, in a departure from what McCarthy calls "my normal style"—i.e., more traditional interiors—he adopted an

approach that married modern with classic. Eschewing fidelity to a single period, he used a mix of furniture from the 1930s through the '50s alongside a variety of commissioned pieces. The dining room, for instance, features minimalist cane-back chairs by Joaquim Tenreiro surrounding a custom-made, reverse-painted glass table inspired by the midcentury Brazilian master. A gracefully spiky '50s Stilnov chandelier descends from above, while a mostly abstract painting by Leo Ray is mounted over a 1930s Dutch walnut cabinet.

"This juxtaposition of elements is, to me, what makes it so chic," McCarthy says. "There's such a youthful, fresh clarity to it all. It's made me see decoration in a totally different way."

In the living room, he installed three large mirrors, which open up the space and create intriguing visual interplay as you move around, glimpsing reflections of the sculptural Hervé Van der Straeten chandelier and works from the Amdurs' collection of Israeli contemporary art. "I'm such a believer in the 18th-century use of mirror," says McCarthy. Nurit, who enjoys an easy banter with the decorator, quips that "this is what scared me—that the apartment would become a mini-Hermitage."

The designer's plan for the kitchen, meanwhile, required coaxing Nurit out of her comfort zone. "I said, 'I want a white kitchen, the pristine kitchen I see in all the magazines,'" she says. When McCarthy suggested cerused-oak cabinetry to emphasize the wood's grain and add more character, Nurit says she replied: "What is ceruse? I've never heard of this ceruse."

But McCarthy found an ally in Rick, and the two of them tag-teamed Nurit on her predilection for white. "Rick said to me, 'Please give me color somewhere,'" the designer recalls. He complied, persuading Nurit to coat the den walls in an aubergine Venetian plaster, which provides a dramatic backdrop for a group of black-and-white photographs of dancers. "It's my little space," Rick says. "I mess it up." The den is still a work in progress; it contains Rick's beloved Eames chair from the old apartment, but he misses his Alvar Aalto chairs.

"In Tel Aviv," Nurit says soothingly. "That's next." On a whim, the couple bought an apartment in a building under construction near their longtime Tel Aviv residence, and they've earmarked certain furnishings for that home when it's finished.

For now, though, the Amdurs are still settling in at the Apthorp. Standing in the dining room, Rick informs McCarthy that changing the lightbulb in the fixture over the table was an ordeal, requiring two ladders and a platform. "Nurit won't let me stand on the table," he says with a shrug.

"No, you don't want to do that," the designer says, giving the fragile glass table a sideways glance. "That's for sure." □

The Hervé Van der Straeten ceiling fixture is a vintage piece from Maison Gerard, the cowhide-upholstered slipper chairs are 1950s French designs from Eric Appel, the cream club chairs are upholstered in a Holly Hunt fabric, and the games table at right is by W. P. Sullivan. A Michael Kovner painting is displayed between the windows, while the fireplace is flanked by works by Lea Nikel, Hannah Ben Dov, and Fima on one side and Jan Rauchwarger on the other.





In the dining room, a 1950s Stilnovo chandelier from Bernd Goeckler is installed above a Carlton House table inspired by Joaquim Tenreiro, who designed the set of circa-1950 chairs from R & Company; the sculpture in front of the mirror is by Robert Zeidman. **Left, from top:** The study is furnished with a midcentury Lumen ceiling fixture from Eric Appel and a rug custom made by Beauvais Carpets; the larger work between the windows is by Menashe Kadishman. Pieces by David Ri (detail) and Jack Mitchell stand out against walls in an aubergine strié Venetian-plaster finish by Mark Giglio.

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The master bedroom's original paneling was embellished with a faux-bois finish by Mark Giglio. An Isamu Noguchi lantern and a 19th-century Chinese bamboo jacket overlook the Jonas Bod and vintage Berge Mogensen bench; the bedside lamps are Gill Hultnäs designs from Lis O'Brien, and the rug is by Beauvais Carpets. *Left:* Fior di Bosco marble clads the walls and countertop in one of the master baths, which is outfitted with a 1960s pendant light from Bernd Göttscker, Thomas O'Brien sconces from Circa Lighting, and Barbara Barry sink fittings by Kalista.



1. The kitchen's clean lines are warmed by cerused-oak cabinetry and surface textures that echo the apartment's other rooms. Designer Brian J. McCarthy opted for a backsplash of hammered-nickel subway tile to reflect light from the overscale windows.

2. McCarthy tapped artisan William P. Sullivan to design a games table with "an organic quality and a bronze leg with just the right patina." The versatile parchment-top piece is perfect for small fireside dinners.



"IF THE PIECES IN THIS APARTMENT WERE ALL GUESTS AT A COCKTAIL PARTY, IT WOULD BE A REALLY COOL AND INTERESTING MIX OF PEOPLE," SAYS BRIAN MCCARTHY



3. A lamp by ceramist Bill Hudnut, whose work is available through Liz O'Brien, accents a bedside table. "It's something gutsy to contrast with the paneling," says McCarthy, who sampled a variety of glazes with Hudnut to create the perfect finish.

4. Decorative artist Mark Giglio softened the bedroom's Jacobean-style paneling with a faux-bois finish in a warm mushroom color. McCarthy juxtaposed the soft tones with a vivid landscape painting and a group of ceramics in complementary hues.

5. The living room's vintage Hervé Van der Straeten chandelier is, in McCarthy's words, "a tour de force." The sculptural fixture, a surreal swirl of patinated bronze, provides an arresting contrast to the intricate original plasterwork that ornaments the ceiling and walls.

6. In the library, the carpet adds a rare splash of pattern and gives the room a strong foundation. When an original 1950s Swedish rug that McCarthy found turned out to be too small, Beauvais wove a replica to suit the dimensions of the space.



7. "I love hanging art on mirror," says McCarthy, explaining the placement of this Leo Ray painting in the dining room. "It transforms your sense of space and adds another layer of dimension. It goes back to the 18th-century trick of capturing light and creating another window."