

DESIGN AT ITS BEST

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# CONTINENTAL KALEIDOSCOPE

DESIGNER BRIAN McCARTHY LEADS HIS  
CLIENTS ON A GRAND TOUR AND BRINGS  
OLD-WORLD STYLE BACK TO PARK AVENUE







**TRADE SECRETS FURNISHINGS** A Louis XIV-style Chassis chair from Reynal Hervouet, Paris, opposite page, is clad in Brunswig & Fils's Suchet and Suchet Medallion horsehair. The ca. 1815 leather-covered French Empire chair, this page, is from Galerie Sylvain Lévy-Alban, Paris. **FLOORING** McCarthy based the stained patterns of the gallery's parquet floors on an 18th-century Russian design. **ARTWORK** The mahogany Empire easel holds an early-19th-century Italian painting depicting a Moor.





## TRADE SECRETS

Ornate details give the living room a sumptuous air. **FURNITURE** Jonas Upholstery's Grange sofa, opposite page. The Louis XVI architect's table, above, is from the Chinese Porcelain Co., NYC. The Empire mahogany desk chair, opposite page, is attributed to Georges Jacob. **FABRICS** Sofa covered in Clarence House's goffered Velours de Lin; curtains are Lee Jofa's Hasketon damask; shades in Travers's Panbury Stripe. **CURTAIN HARDWARE** By Joseph Biunno, NYC.

Not just another street, Park Avenue is a signifier—of power, stability, civility, and luxury. Living there places you in a world where even apartments often come with pedigrees. But sometimes, in the course of creating a home that suits its address, you may find yourself swept into an unexpected romance, conducted, of course, with discretion and decorum.

Such was the case for the new owners of an apartment in a classic 1916 James Carpenter building, among New York's most desirable, thanks to the units' fine proportions and formal layouts—each one is designed around the central hub of an entrance gallery. The couple decided to move into Manhattan after their children had left the nest. They wanted to start fresh, bringing almost nothing from their previous house, but had never undertaken a decorating project on this scale. So they turned to Brian McCarthy, a Parish-Hadley alumnus and a designer known for his refined, traditional

interiors and attention to detail. (Their real estate broker acted as matchmaker.)

Since New Yorkers first settled this strip they have sought out old-world treasures to fill their rooms. This couple were no different; they simply requested that McCarthy create a European atmosphere that would be formal yet warm and welcoming. He seduced them with the promise of an apartment in the grand tour style, in which objects and furniture from different countries and centuries would come together in a complex, harmonious blend. McCarthy acted as his clients' guide, leading them to discover a love for material culture, and they have ended up with a fine collection of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century furniture from France, Italy, England, and Russia. They were thrilled by the chase and hooked by the bounty. "Their enthusiasm spurred me on," McCarthy says. "We didn't always go to the top dealers. Trying to be clever, we shopped in out-of-the-way places and with smaller dealers. We



A 19TH-CENTURY SULTANABAD CARPET AND A JIAQING PERIOD (1796-1820) COROMANDEL SCREEN ARE THE FOUNDATIONS FOR RICH LAYERS OF PATTERN AND COLOR IN THE LIVING ROOM







found pieces that were unrestored and brought them back. We found things they felt they could not live without, at good prices."

McCarthy, with the help of former associate Suzanne Williams and architect Robert Anthony, began by restructuring the apartment's front portion, carving out separate living and dining rooms from what had been a unified area, in order to satisfy his clients' desire for a distinct sense of architecture. McCarthy and his team expanded the height and width of the door frames to suit the rooms' grand scale and to echo the elegant windows, which McCarthy lovingly describes as "perfect for curtains." They designed architectural details, including plaster cornices and ornate bracketed dentil molding. They laid down parquet floors of quarter-sawn white oak. "From top to bottom, nothing of the old apartment remained," the designer says.

From the minute you cross the threshold, his intentions are clear. With just a few strokes, the entrance hall expresses the sensibility of a Continental collector.▷

#### TRADE SECRETS

**FURNITURE** French Restoration dining table, ca. 1825, from Galerie Camoin, Paris. Reproduction Empire chairs by Vosges, Paris. **FABRICS** Bergère, above, by Michel Jamet, Paris, in Old World Weavers' linen velvet, embroidered by Penn & Fletcher. **LIGHTING** Early-19th-century Russian chandelier from Philippe Perrin, Paris. **MANTELS** Custom-cast with Vitruvian scrolls, hand-painted by Jean Carrau.



THE OPEN RED FIELD OF THE CARPET AND THE TURQOISE ACCENTS IN AN EARLY-19TH-CENTURY RUSSIAN CHANDELIER OFFSET THE SOBER ELEGANCE OF THE DINING ROOM'S BROWN LACQUERED WALLS





**THE CURTAINS ARE CUT LIKE COUTURE AND TRIMMED WITH PASSEMENTERIE MADE IN PARIS. GILDED RODS SUPPORTING DAMASK PANELS, SWAGS, AND JABOTS COMPLETE THE EFFECT**

Classical plaster molding punctuates glazed green walls. The floor, based on an eighteenth-century Russian model, is stenciled and painted with stain in an elaborate geometric pattern. An Italian painting depicting a Moor rests on an early-nineteenth-century French Empire easel. The sculptural presence of this pairing declares the enticing power of objects to articulate history. “When I found that easel, I just thought, eureka!” says McCarthy. “Nothing to that point had said, ‘I’m the answer to all your problems.’”

But falling in love with individual pieces is one thing; marrying them to create a certain mood is quite another. “Decorating is not an academic exercise,” the designer explains. “It’s an exercise of feeling. It is artistic. For me, the process is so much about responding to actual things—furniture, fabric, objects. You want to evoke emotion. You want to create magic.” Through its layers of pattern and texture, what strikes you first about the living room is simply an enveloping sense of luxury. McCarthy often begins with the carpets, in this case Sultanabads from Doris Leslie Blau. Their palette became the foundation for a cohesive color scheme of faded reds, green, gold, and brown. He is particularly proud of his curtains, which are cut like couture and trimmed with passementerie custom-made in Paris. Gilded rods support red and gold damask panels, swags, and jabots. Behind them glow unlined striped silk festoon shades. “I think it’s sophisticated and splendid, but also very livable,” says one of his clients.

To foster a sense of intimacy and balance in the large space, McCarthy created two seating areas, anchoring one with a tall early-nineteenth-century coromandel screen that shows wonderful palace scenes. At the far end of the room, bookshelves flank a doorway that leads to the dining room. The shelves are lined with marbled book paper and edged with scalloped leather gimp embossed in gold. Particular treasures *(Cont. on page 117)*







### TRADE SECRETS

FURNISHINGS Empire commode, ca. 1815, opposite page, from Galerie Flore, Paris. In the powder room, a late-18th-century Directoire gilt wood mirror and ca. 1815 French Empire wall sconces shimmer against lacquered walls. Nugget series hardware by P. E. Guerin, NYC. FABRICS In the library, Brunschwig & Fil's silk Leopard Velvet covers a chair attributed to Percier and Fontaine. Dining room curtains in Old World Weavers' Chardonnay silk taffeta. Sources, see back of book. [houseandgarden.com](http://houseandgarden.com).



## CONTINENTAL KALEIDOSCOPE

*(Cont. from page 73)* subtly draw your attention: a Louis XVI architect's table, an armchair attributed to Georges Jacob, an eighteenth-century Austrian gilt-wood mantel clock. Low velvet sofas and chintz-clad armchairs offer comfortable spots to sink into. "You must think about the skyline of a room," McCarthy says. "Consider the rhythm of silhouettes against the wall. There must be peaks and valleys. That's what creates interest and a sense of ease."

As a counterpoint to the living room's intricacy, he rendered the dining room with dramatic gestures. Its lacquered chocolate brown walls were done at the husband's request. Paintings of muscular Roman warriors, larger than life, face off across a nineteenth-century French Restoration dining table, centered in the open field of another unusual Sultanabad from Doris Leslie Blau. Inspired by an eighteenth-century Italian design, McCarthy created the plaster mantel, which is shallow but tall enough to be visible above the plane of the table. But the masterpiece here is an early-nineteenth-century Russian chandelier, a twin to one in Pavlovsk. "I've never seen another as beautiful," McCarthy claims. Its turquoise glass, in concert with watery silk festoon shades and the aqua notes in the carpet's border, quietly contrasts with the room's warmer tones. "The blue gave this dining room a pulse," he says.

A tiny study paneled in Persian burl walnut and straight-grain American walnut houses more treasures, including nineteenth-century gouaches of Vesuvius erupting over the Bay of Naples and a chair attributed to Percier and Fontaine, Napoleon's architects. "I went nuts when I saw the chair," the designer says. "I called my clients and said, 'You have to own this piece. It's nonnegotiable.'" Luckily, they weren't in the mood to argue.

In the end, what began as a whirlwind affair has turned into a long-term relationship with beautiful objects. "Good decoration edits itself," McCarthy says. "You no longer accept or reject pieces. The space does it for you. It becomes obvious what belongs and what doesn't. You just have to listen. It's not easy, but it is that simple." □