



THIS PAGE: In the den, two Donghia sofas face a nut coffee table adorned with a pair of armor ceramics from the 1950s and a German vase. Sepia botanical prints by Karl Blossfeldt and a Stark sisal carpet pick up the room's earth tones; a travertine-topped table with Paul Cobb stools, set against bronze silk curtains, adds modern sophistication. OPPOSITE PAGE: In the foyer, 1960s porcelain lamps and a Fortuny pendant shed light on the exquisite parquet floors, moldings, and other wood details of the circa-1890 building.

UPPER WEST SIDE

LAYER FOR LAYER

JOHN KRENEK AND JAMIE NIBLOCK UPDATE A 19TH-CENTURY HOTEL APARTMENT WITH THEIR ICONOCLASTIC MIX OF MODERN AND GLOBAL DESIGN

WHEN THE PROLIFIC row-house architect John G. Prague built the Brockholst—a luxury residential hotel at 85th Street and Columbus Avenue—in 1890, it boasted grand marble halls and a lobby ceiling of aluminum leaf by Tiffany & Co. More than a century later, in 1991, it was these details that persuaded Jamie Niblock, director of retail operations for the optical firm Robert Marc, to overlook the “off-color shag carpet, peach-colored walls, and Bahamian-themed décor” of the seven-room apartment he eventually moved into. He had no particular vision for the place, he recalls, so “I had every square inch painted white.” But when he discovered this was the only apartment in the building with all its original details, he began restoring the parquet floors, wainscoting, and ornate moldings. By the time John Krenek entered his life eight years ago, the renovation was mostly complete.

“It was a clean palette,” remembers Krenek, former international creative director for Ferragamo. The couple immediately set to work decorating. Fortunately, Krenek observes, “We share the exact same design aesthetic.” That aesthetic is hard to classify. Call it relaxed mid-century glam with a global infusion. Certainly the dominant sensibility is modern. Foundation pieces are primarily circa 1950s and 1960s punctuated by elements of glitz. But ethnic touches bring things back down to earth. “It’s about atmosphere and layering,” says Krenek. “To me, layering is what gives a room its flavor and personality.” The layering is textural as well (a patchwork cowhide rug matched with Plexiglas zigzag dining chairs and 1960s ceramic lamps). “We like the unexpected,” Krenek says.



Their friends like it, too: they urged the couple to open the Spruce Design and Décor home furnishings store in High Falls, New York, from which they also offer design consulting.

The apartment’s eccentric eclecticism is perhaps the only thing that connects it to the Brockholst’s late-Victorian past. Small wonder that the building itself became the setting for Woody Allen’s *Curse of the Jade Scorpion*; smaller wonder still that Niblock and Krenek’s space never fails to delight, stimulate, and surprise. **SEE RESOURCES**



enek and Niblock are drawn
black-and-white photography.
the dining room, these are
played, along with various
arcoals, against rich chocolate-
own walls. The room is a
mplex orchestration of industrial
dern furnishings and organic
tures: a patchwork cowhide rug,
Corbusier table, Plexi-Craft
zag chairs, custom iron
andlesticks hand-forged by a
oklyn metalworker, a Heywood-
skfield-like credenza, 1960s
omic lamps, and a gold-leafed
roc (providing the touch of
amour that is a signature of the
uple's aesthetic).

THIS PAGE: The two designers matched the glamour of gold-and-cream Bisazza tiles on the fireplace surround with luminous hand-strung Capiz curtains in the living room. Two Knoll chairs with Flokati toss pillows, Laurel lamps, and a Saarinen table sit on a Missoni carpet from Roubini. OPPOSITE PAGE: Through the French doors with the transom window is the study, where a French Deco desk (a flea-market find the men restored) shares the room with a Chinese screen, a carved panel bought in Hong Kong, an Ashanti stool, and a glass bowl from Moss.



THIS PAGE: The bedroom "is like a cocoon," says Krenek. A chaise believed to be a Thonet forms a vignette with a Laurel lamp and a picture of Mamie Van Doren, part of a cache of vintage photos from a private collection the couple sells through Spruce Design, their store in upstate High Falls, New York. OPPOSITE PAGE: The theatricality of the black matte walls and glossy black trim is grounded by ethnic textures and artwork (Tucker Robbins lamps, Vietnamese prints). The nightstands are John Stuart tables from the 1960s, with a Paul McCobb table nested under the one on the left and a Philippe Starck on the right.



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