

# NEW YORK SPACES

THE HOME DESIGN MAGAZINE OF METROPOLITAN NEW YORK



## Asian obsession

57 FRESH OUTDOOR IDEAS | HOT NEW GIZMOS | COLUMBUS CIRCLE MAKEOVER  
PARED-DOWN PARK AVENUE | COCONUT COUTURE | BACKYARD BENCHES

# Asian obsession

Treasures from the Far East find a fitting home  
on the Upper East Side

A bust of Buddha was acquired from an antiques dealer in Amsterdam, while a full-body version was located in Switzerland.

IT WAS A THREE-MONTH trip to India, Indonesia and Thailand in 1989 that sparked Judy Witt's love affair with Asian art and antiques, but she would wait more than 10 years to truly indulge her passion. In 2001 she purchased a Manhattan pied-à-terre and teamed with designer David Scott, principal of New York-based David Scott Interiors, to finally create the perfect backdrop for a collection of Eastern artifacts.

Witt, 44, and her 9-year-old son, Liam, split their time between the 4,000-square-foot three-bedroom apartment and a 1912 brick colonial home in Baltimore, where she is editor of *Overture*, the magazine of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. Making the showcase approachable for him was key—nothing in her Upper East Side flat is off limits.

"I want my son to develop the same love and appreciation for Asian art and culture that I have," Witt explains. "Therefore, everything has to be very accessible to him."

And so Scott worked with architect Scott Ageloff of Ageloff & Associates in New York to remodel the 1950s-style apartment, removing walls and doors to create a more open and inviting floor plan. The ebonized walnut floors are hand-finished; the







The blues in the Asian artwork are picked up in the room's fabric and accent pieces, unifying objects from different periods.

foyer ceiling features a finish of silver leaf. Throughout the space, neutral tones let the artwork provide the color and flair. One feature that does stand out: the library ceiling, which was painted to resemble a Chinese lacquer box.

"Judy wanted the apartment to be

warm, not stuffy," says Scott. "Even though many of the antiques are museum-quality pieces, they're all very approachable."

On that trip in 1989, Witt was taken with intricate miniature Indian paintings from the 15th and 16th centuries. Today, her apartment

boasts more than 20 of these complex works, all of which feature images of women engaged in various activities of daily life. Similar pieces currently sell for more than \$30,000 at auction.

Scott and Witt collaborated closely in assembling the collection, which now comprises more than 100 pieces. One with a pedigree is a statue of Guanyin, the Chinese Buddhist goddess of mercy, that once graced the apartment of author Gertrude Stein. "When you look at the belly, you can see it has been rubbed for good luck," Witt says. "But the other interesting thing is that there is a photo of the statue in Stein's apartment in a book about Picasso."

A secretary from India also has a storied past. Its sandalwood interior features a secret compartment, which when opened reveals a letter written in 1920 describing how the piece had been passed down through the generations of the original family of owners.

Other notable objects include two round pillows used by a Chinese emperor, inlaid Moroccan wooden tables, antique Japanese woodblock prints, a 16th-century decorative room screen from Thailand, reverse-glass paintings and sandstone carvings of heads from southeast Asia.

"Judy's apartment is like music," says Scott, "with the different pieces like different notes, working together to create a beautiful symphony." ☐