

DESIGN & DECORATING

IDEAS TO STEAL

Staged Rooms With Real Appeal

A Manhattan show house offers scads of décor inspiration, from an exotic mural to a chic way to hide the AC

BY JEN RENZI

THE KIPS BAY Decorator Show House, arguably the country's most prestigious, inevitably gets a lot of buzz. But this year it's about the location: Breaking a long-held tradition of being staged in a grand Upper East Side brownstone, the show house moved to a contemporary luxury high-rise overlooking the Hudson River. To the uninitiated, this is the design equivalent of your rich aunt going condo, trading in her town house near the Met for the conveniences of new construction and a river view.

Turns out that shaking things up is good for the show house—this is one of the freshest in recent memory—and for visitors scrutinizing the décor for take-aways. The 30-some featured designers were challenged to give patina and character to a backdrop of white walls, plain moldings and the occasionally awkward nooks that are the bête noir of modern construction—conditions that many of us face in our own homes.

While the main living areas boast double-height ceilings and sweeping water views through expansive windows, the more modestly scaled (and fenestrated) private quarters prove a case study in transforming intimate confines—none larger than 14 by 14 feet—into resplendent retreats. Here, three designers share the inspirations behind their quietly masculine, art-filled aeries.

The show house, which benefits the Kips Bay Boys & Girls Club, is open to the public through June 14. kipsbaydecoratorshowhouse.org



Gentleman's Study | David Scott

The Main Idea: Frame your objets—and your view

For his study, David Scott aspired to create a look that was more "curated" than decorated. He envisioned a rich but light-toned décor with a gray-blue grasscloth wall covering and embroidered worsted-wool window treatments. "The color is seamless but the textures shift," Mr. Scott said. "You don't want a room that you can take in all at once; you want to discover details as you sit in there."

Fake a window: "When I work on a room that has only one window, I think, How do I create a view? I'll often use a painting. Here, I hung an abstract work by Larry Zox behind the antique desk, creating a dialogue of old and new. The painting is more about the canvas itself than the imagery. That openness makes it feel like a window."

Arrange with an eye for asymmetry: "I imagined the client here as a guy who's collected things from all over the world. Filling the wall niche is this great brutalist Paul Evans étagère with shelves of bronze-y smoked glass that I used to frame vignettes of objects—art, pottery, tortoise-shell—that are arrayed like little still lifes. When arranging, think about balancing symmetry with a bit of tension and asymmetry."

Treat curtains

as architecture:

"Behind the chaise is the sole window, anchored by a curtain on just one side. In general, think of curtains as architecture rather than as decoration. I like floor-to-ceiling window treatments; I think it extends the eye through the space."

Dress windows with wool: "Wool hangs beautifully. It's such a sturdy fabric. It won't deteriorate or fade in the sun like silk or printed cotton—it's generally more colorfast. Wool also cleans easily; you can actually brush it like a suit. I hate overly flouncy curtains, particularly in a man's study."

Sources: Wall covering, upholstery and window-treatment fabric: Holland & Sherry. Faux zebra silk rug: Carini Lang. George VII writing table: Kentshire. Paul Evans shelving: Todd Merrill Antiques. Larry Zox canvas: Stephen Haller Gallery.



Photographs by James Ransom for The Wall Street Journal. Photo on left: Matt Zions, photo on right: Stephen Haller Gallery

Writing Room | Chuck Fischer

The Main Idea: Treat the walls as a world unto themselves

Chuck Fischer converted a 124-square-foot space into a writing room, adding architectural interest and whimsy with hand-painted Chinoiserie walls. "It really opens up the room," the muralist/designer noted. "I like the light touch of this, which is a bit exotic, a bit tropical. My idea was to have a little escape in the city." Against the peachy terra-cotta walls he placed aqua-colored accents and modern furnishings, including a striking 1950s brass floor lamp.

One-up wallpaper: "There are advantages to working with a muralist: you can choose all the colors, be a bit more spontaneous and personalize it by incorporating details like portraits or pets. And if you don't have a great art collection yet, it's a wonderful way to start."

Think small(er)—and longer term: If a whole-room mural seems daunting, commission an accent wall or smaller-scale canvas instead. "Lately I've been doing a lot of signature walls and large panels, or even something framed," Mr. Fischer said. "It's still a statement but not so immersive. Here, I painted directly on the walls, but painting on canvas allows a client to take their piece with



them if they move."

Let the walls breathe: "You want to pull the furniture off the walls a bit to let the mural shine. The flow is much better without a desk smack against the wall. And floating it lets the lamp on top become a more central light source."

Screen an exposed AC: "So many of us have this problem: You walk into a room and see a big white AC unit sticking out. I wanted to hide it without using cabinetry, so I came up with the idea of a folding screen. The design is quite low so it doesn't block the view or the light. I upholstered it with the same fabric as the Roman shade above—a faux grasscloth—to tie it all together."

Sources: Screen fabric: Hunter Douglas. Decorative painting: Chuck Fischer Studio. Desk: Alpha Workshops through Profiles. Floor lamp: Alan Moss Antiques. Tub chair: Brunswick & Fils.



Collector's Bedroom | Alexander Doherty

The Main Idea: Wall paneling is an art-lover's best friend

Alexander Doherty dispels a couple of decorating myths in his room: that wood wall paneling is oppressive and dark, and that hanging art salon-style makes a room feel smaller.

Create (subtle) wow factor: "Many people have preconceived ideas about paneling: They think of Upper East Side mansions, their grandmother's fuddy-duddy home—stiff and formal, dark and depressing. But big geometric squares of cerused oak give paneling a contemporary look. The approach makes modern construction more warm and livable."

Don't fear an abundance of art: "I wanted to open visitors' minds to new ways of living with and hanging art. Many people think you can put one painting in the middle of a wall and call it a day; they believe lots of paintings would be oppressive. But in this 14-by-14-foot room, I hung 11 relatively large canvases...that's a lot of art! And it feels very light in there. The oak paneling is a great foil because it's so serene. Anything you set against it looks good."

Forgo the lighting consultant: "You do not need a picture light over every artwork, or directional spotlights hitting every painting. You do not live in the Met! I am a big believer in just using lots of great lamps."

Sources: Braided jute rug: Stark Carpet. Daybed: Zelaya Interiors LLC. Vintage T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbings commode: John Koch Antiques.



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