

FOR VAL ARNOLD, the measure of success has been the frequency with which clients have returned to him in a career of nearly four decades. Sylvia Blumenfeld, who was one of his early clients, has asked him to design five residences over the years, including two near San Francisco and two in Palm Springs. When she came to him for her latest apartment, he saw it as an opportunity to winnow, cull and edit. "I wanted her to get rid of a lot of stuff she'd been carrying around from house to house," explains Arnold.

The two-bedroom apartment, in San Francisco's Nob Hill district, is on the fifth floor of a new building. It came as a shell with concrete floors and ceilings. Arnold, who is known for his research and for looking to the past for solutions to contemporary problems, wanted to add the appearance of history. "I took my cues from Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann, a French designer who was also one of the best cabinetmakers of the Art Déco period," he says. "Ruhlmann borrowed from the Directoire and Empire periods, so his work is Neoclassical in feeling."

Arnold, in turn, drew from those periods in the invention of the apartment. "I wanted a device to hide the window frames," he says. Ruhlmann-inspired cherry lambrequins with black outlines were built to surround windows and conceal the edges of the draperies. The walls were painted and glazed in a subtle, irregular grid pattern, and small rectangles of wood were affixed along the top to simulate the molding of an older apartment. The walnut floors were laid in a herringbone pattern.

Concrete anonymity was not the lone difficulty of the apartment. Arnold and his client thought the layout was confining, with dead ends and wasted space. "I'm building a stage set for the interior architecture," he says. The living room was overly large, with a fireplace that was not centered on the wall. "You couldn't use half the room the way the apartment was designed." Arnold replaced

San Francisco Style

Art Déco Elements Inform a Smart City Residence

INTERIOR DESIGN BY VAL ARNOLD
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"I wanted to make this a sophisticated, eclectic apartment in which either a man or a woman would be comfortable," says Sylvia Blumenfeld of her Nob Hill residence. To help her achieve her aims, she turned to Val Arnold. BELOW: In the hall off the master bedroom, a Sam Francis oil dominates. A black-and-white oil by Albert Beck Wenzell hangs over an ebony-and-gilt table; at right is an Henri Cartier-Bresson drawing.





ABOVE: In the living room, whose view encompasses the Transamerica Building and the financial district, furnishings include 19th-century Biedermeier *bergères en gondole*, Oriental lacquered low tables and a sofa covered in Scalamandrè fabric. Mounted over the stone mantel is an oil by Paul Biva, a 19th-century French painter.

ment was decorated in a light palette, with furniture upholstered in cream silk. Arnold suggested a bolder, more direct approach for the new residence. Black and gold are employed throughout, but in a subdued manner. The coppery tones of the walls and floors are echoed on the sofas, which anchor the living room. A Persian garden carpet of yellows, oranges and greens softens the graphic power of the room.

The dining area at one end of the living room is defined by the George IV breakfast table inlaid with brass filigree. The four upholstered chairs, covered in peach cotton satin, are Arnold's design. With the Art Déco chairs scattered throughout the apartment, the table can seat eight. A round Biedermeier table in the library can be similarly arranged so Mrs. Blumenfeld can comfortably seat sixteen for dinner at two tables. "All the work I do is comfortable," says

Arnold. "I don't care how glamorous it gets, as long as people can sit down and have everything they need at their fingertips. I believe you should use furniture and not be afraid to put a drink on the table."

Adds Arnold, "I'm a shopper. That's my forte, but not everything is going to be a bargain. I buy in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Paris. I saw the Russian Neoclassical chests in the master bedroom in an auction catalogue. I buy things that are consistent in value. If it's nineteenth century, let it be the best. Early twentieth century is okay, too. It's almost antique now, or will be in ten years.

"This is more masculine than her last apartment," muses Arnold. "But I think pretty women look better in a masculine room. A feminine room can be overpowering. I think the yin and yang have come together in this apartment." □

RIGHT: Mirrored sconces frame the doorway of the intimate paneled library, created from what was previously a continuation of the oversize living room. A Biedermeier-style center table holds a Swedish porphyry urn. Armchair fabric from Brunschwig & Fils; welt cord from Manuel Canovas. Clarence House drapery fabric.



walls between the rooms with mahogany double doors that allow the flexibility of opening or closing off specific areas for privacy. In substituting double doors for the wall between the master bedroom and the library, he produced a suite that is larger yet more intimate, used for watching television or reading before going to bed.

Moving additional walls in the center of the apartment resulted in large

storage closets. "You can have a small apartment if you have large enough closets for storage. Mrs. Blumenfeld needed the room to keep her china, crystal, linens and other objects she'd brought from the earlier houses." Such revisions to the layout produced what Arnold calls a "racetrack," a clear flow of traffic through the space. "It's much neater and better-looking."

The subtle blend of Neoclassical and Art Déco is apparent in the ante-

room, where the elevator opens to a view of a Biedermeier urn and a gilt side chair. In the entrance hall, a George III mirror and an early-nineteenth-century plant stand complement a handsome Biedermeier chest. When Sylvia Blumenfeld bought a nineteenth-century English daybed and a Napoleonic urn for the living room, Arnold recalls, "That started us moving in a positive direction."

Mrs. Blumenfeld's previous apart-

"My hope was that this apartment could be anywhere—in Paris, New York, San Francisco or Los Angeles," says Mrs. Blumenfeld. In combining Neoclassical and Art Déco elements, Arnold was able to give a sense of age to the apartment, which is located in a new building. In the foreground, a Neoclassical gilt chair stands in the vestibule leading to the double-doored elevator. A Dutch urn with ebonized bands is at left. It and the George II parcel-gilt mirror in the adjoining entrance hall are from Hyde Park Antiques. Next to the flower-decked Biedermeier chest, which has ebonized and ormolu accents, is an early-19th-century plant stand.



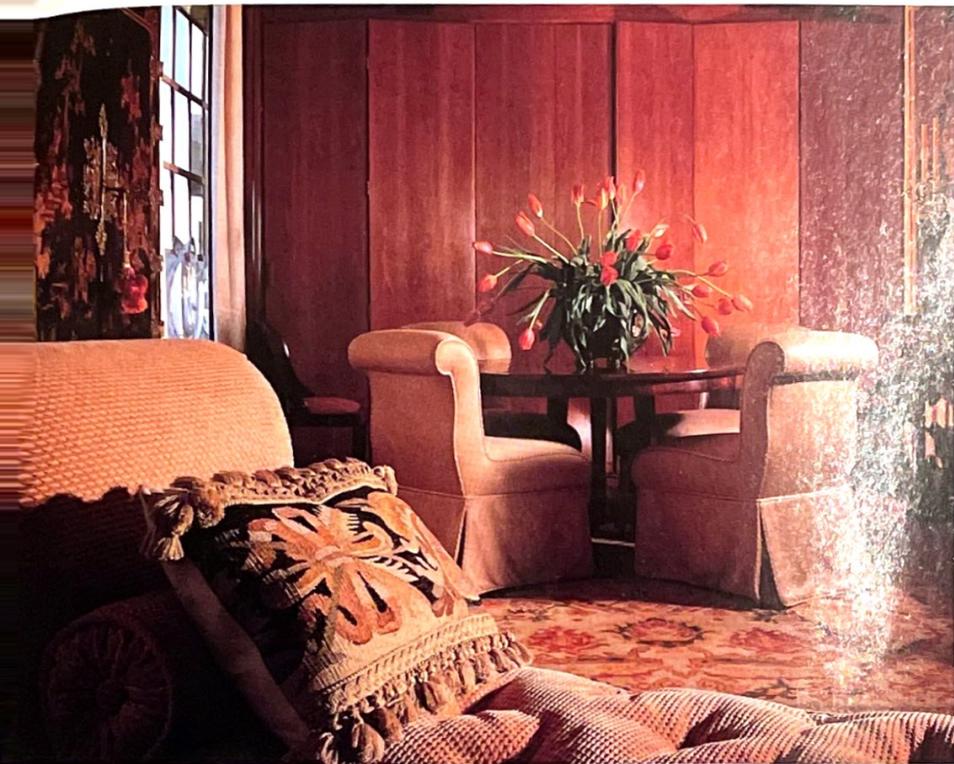


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"I hate high sheen on floors or glass on tables. I like a richer, warmer look," says Arnold, who was inspired by French designer Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann. The living room is characterized by copper tones and Neoclassical and Art Déco pieces, such as the black-and-gilt Regency-style daybed with scroll ends and paired Biedermeier *bergères en gondole*. The large painting is by James Weeks. Next to it is an Edgar Brandt bronze python torchère. At rear, a Toulouse-Lautrec gouache, Persian garden carpet.



Arnold suggested a bolder, more direct approach for the new residence.

OPPOSITE: In the dining area, a giltwood mirror reflects a 1961 portrait by Nathan Oliveira. LEFT: The 19th-century English rosewood dining table is from Hyde Park Antiques. At left, an Oriental lacquered chest. The Belgian tapestry pillow is 17th century.

BELOW: "I didn't want someone to think of it as Madame de Pompadour's bedroom," says Mrs. Blumenfeld of the tailored master suite. The tufted sleigh bed, set against an embroidered Portuguese silk wall hanging, is flanked by 19th-century Russian fruitwood chests. Oil paintings are by James Weeks, left, and Elmer Bischoff. Swedish Neoclassical painted and gilded bench.

