



# A TALE OF TWO APARTMENTS

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**R**ETURNING TO HIS NATIVE MANHATTAN AFTER SEVERAL years in Los Angeles, interior designer Andrew Raquet had a nasty shock. Where was all that open space? Where, for that matter, was the sky?

To compensate for the absence of horizontality, he went vertical. He moved into a 1970s high-rise in the East 60s, a black glass tower that, as he puts it, "any arms dealer would have been happy to call home."

He scored a one-bedroom on the 19th floor with a view of the East River and, following the example of artist Georgia O'Keeffe who had a similar view from her midtown apartment, hung no curtains on the windows. Standard issue mini-blinds

*Rich faux coromandel lacquer walls provide a warm background for Raquet's eclectic mix that stretches back across the centuries, including the 1930s Venetian mirrored coffee table, the 17th-century Chinese porcelains on 19th-Century architectural mounts, and 18th-Century French armchairs.*

were left in place and only dropped for the exigencies of privacy. The building was flashy and he concocted an interior to match, lacquering the walls in a faux coromandel surface of chocolate brown and adding a couple of Zebra carpets, of course. The smoky mirror surfaces of the 1930s Italian cabinet and coffee table, the mirror framed in silver and gold-leaf nuts and hung over the Chesterfield sofa, the brass bookcases—all





*In the dining gallery of his first apartment, a vintage Baker Knole-style sofa provided additional seating as a banquette for dinner parties. The 1970's brass and lucite swing arm lamps are being reproduced by Raquet as part of his lighting collection.*

reflected the dark colors and added to the living room's sultry atmosphere. "It was an apartment for nighttime," he explains. "All those dark colors may have looked a little scary during the daytime, but at night it absolutely glowed."

After a couple of years, Raquet decided to exchange the anonymity of the 350-unit building for the cozy familiarity of a building with just 45 apartments. Also located in the East 60s, between Madison and Park, the edifice was designed by architect Rosario Candela. "It is categorized as 'pre-war' by real estate brokers, but I like to think of it as 'during the war,' as it was begun

in 1940 and completed in 1941," Raquet says. "The building is intimate and my neighbors are a particularly nice group of people."

As Raquet was spending more of his time at home in the second apartment, he wanted it to be pretty by day as well as by night, and opted for pleasant buff-colored walls. Lacking the dramatic view, he ordered sheer, roll-up shades by Hunter Douglas and had them installed on every window. Then, he made up for not having the opportunity to do curtains in the previous apartment by draping every casement with yards and yards of custom-printed silk from Quadrille. For the living room curtains, he had the silk printed in a pattern borrowed from the Parisian draperies of the Duchess of Windsor.

The rest of the silk for curtains came from his efforts at Kips Bay Decorator Show House, where he had transformed an old laundry room into a glamorous sitting room. The fabric was not the only item to be brought home at the conclusion of this month-long prestigious showcase. The pièce de résistance of Raquet's room at Kips Bay was a 25-panel screen of mirror and fabric squares. Raquet had the glass cut in Charleston, S.C., and shipped to an engraver in

Brooklyn, who duplicated the pattern that was on the silk. The glass panels went through a silver antiquing process before being installed into a custom-built frame. The pattern on the mirrors, reflecting the pattern on the Quadrille fabric was, as they say in this business, *fabulous*. So fabulous that he sold a large portion of the screen to clients, who had it shipped to their apartment in Paris where it now adorns their dining room.

The remaining panels of the screen were reassembled in Raquet's new living room, where they lend the impression of shimmering depth. They keep company with a pair of Italian Louis XVI parcel-gilt torchères. These, too, have a story. He borrowed them from a friend to use at Kips Bay but found he couldn't part with them. The sale of the mirrored screen underwrote the acquisition of the torchères. This is the curse of working with beautiful objects; one just has to own them. He is not





*Above: The reverse-engraved mirrored screen made for the Klips Bay show house sits in Raquet's new living room with a custom sofa and hand-made pillows. Right: In the bedroom, this armless sofa with lucite and brass legs, Raquet's own design, is accentuated by the ivory cotton velvet drapes.*

intimidated by them, however, and to prove the point, topped them with spiky coconut shell lamps that glow like anemones.

While some leftovers from other show house appearances make a big splash in his living room, most of the furniture was brought over from the original high-rise apartment. The Louis XV chairs have their antique origins offset by a bold Clarence House velvet from the '70s, called *Le Jungle*. The Venetian-mirrored coffee table and cabinet, which looked so decadent in the high-rise, now add reflected light to the room. A brass *étagère*, modeled after the one that Billy Baldwin designed for Cole Porter's Waldorf=Astoria apartment, divides the room and houses collections of porcelain and books.

Raquet laments that his cream-colored, linen-velvet Chesterfield, only two years old, did not fit through the door of his new apartment—but he mitigated his pain by donating it to Housing Works, a charity which operates thrift stores to provide housing and other services for homeless New Yorkers. To replace the Chesterfield, he designed what he calls a “Coco Chanel-esque” sofa in cream linen velvet with a rolled arm. The settee with the scalloped back now stands at the entrance







**Above:** Faux shagreen clothes and shoe cases bring order to the bedroom. The padded silk headboard is inspired by a Philadelphia highboy Raquet saw at the Metropolitan Museum. **Right:** Rare 17th Chinese blanc d'ivoire Fu dogs rest on the fireplace mantel with figural vases painted white.

to his apartment along with one of his zebra rugs.

Unlike Raquet's first apartment, the second came with a dining room, which he transformed into a study, with his old living room book shelves now holding catalogues and files. Raquet also designed the zebrawood bureau plat.

Still, the dramatic difference between the two apartments has less to do with furniture than with backgrounds. Largely by changing wall colors and window treatments, using hues somber or fair, Raquet gave each of his living rooms an entirely different look. The mixture of antiques acquired over time, pieces that Raquet has designed for various show houses, and elements of his own eccentric taste give both of these living rooms a sense of dimension and history that is quite welcoming. In Manhattan, that is always a good feeling. ♦

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