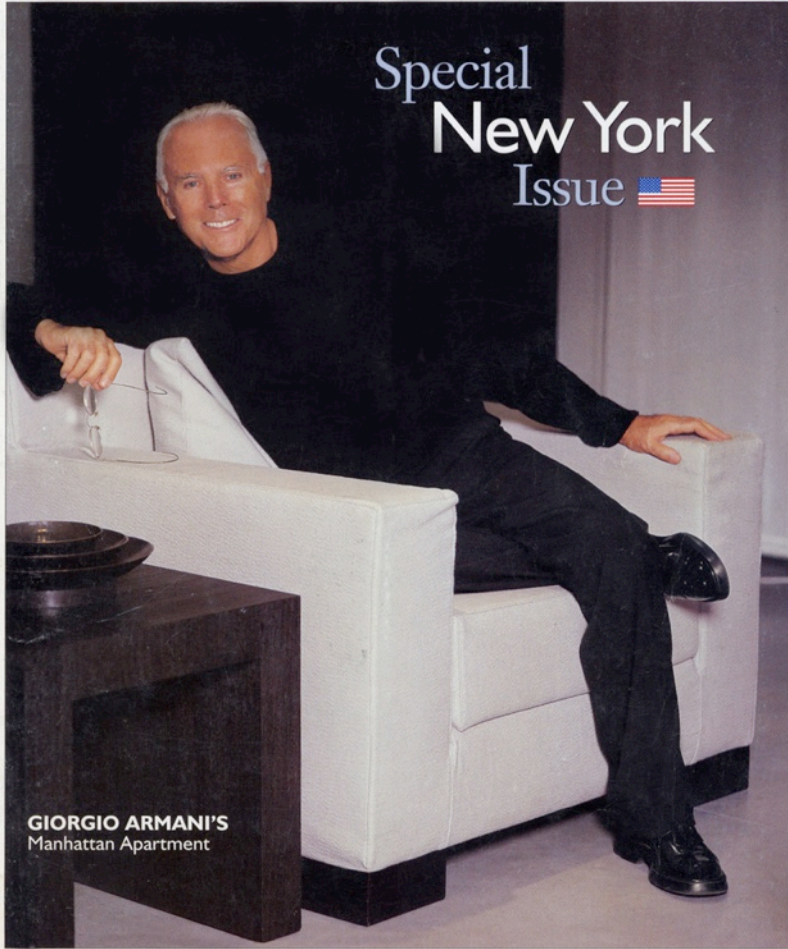


# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF INTERIOR DESIGN

APRIL 2002

Special  
New York  
Issue 



**GIORGIO ARMANI'S**  
Manhattan Apartment



"What was once little and precious is today strong and refined," says architect Lee Mindel (below), of Shelton, Mindel & Associates, who, with his partner, Peter Shelton, reconfigured and brought light into a cramped condominium in a former industrial building in Chelsea.

OPPOSITE: In the entrance hall are *Fervor Series* by Shirin Neshat, a Poul Kjaerholm metal cube table, a console by Jean Prouvé and a Fritz Henningsen armchair. RIGHT: Sarah Lucas's *The Law* faces a Le Corbusier low table in the living room. Sofa fabric from B & B Italia.



BEFORE & AFTER

# Going with the Flow

MODERNIST FURNITURE FINDS ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE IN CHELSEA

Architecture and Interior Design by Shelton, Mindel & Associates  
Text by Steven M. L. Aronson/After Photography by Scott Frances

Simplicity can be the most complicated thing to achieve," observes Lee Mindel, of Shelton, Mindel & Associates, a Manhattan firm with a forte for artfully integrating architecture and interior design. "Sometimes it's not how much you do," his partner, Peter Shelton, offers, "it's how much you undo." The first time they cast eyes on their client's Manhattan pied-à-terre, they understood that their work would consist in large measure of editing out intrusive architecture: They

would concentrate on creating a unified space that not only expanded the sight lines but left the eye itself unfettered—free to be drawn to the extraordinary modernist furniture they envisaged striking root and flourishing there, as well as to the collection of contemporary art already assembled by the client.

The Minneapolis-based CEO of an international investment firm, he had been attracted to the Chelsea area not least because the downtown gallery scene had shifted there from SoHo. A recent-

ly converted office building, designed in the first decade of the 20th century for the National Cloak and Suit Company, had seemed a perfect fit and he'd gone ahead and purchased a three-bedroom, 2,200-square-foot condominium on its 15th floor. "The perspective was just right—the apartment wasn't so low that you felt right on the brink of the hurly-burly of the city," he says, "nor so high up that you felt totally detached from it." The views—of the Hudson and East rivers and of the lower Manhattan sky-







They were determined to anchor the rooms through the use of robust period pieces consonant with the quality of the original building.



line—were far- and wide-reaching, and the 1,200-square-foot terrace in effect extended the floor plane out beyond the windows, lending a sense of groundedness in the illimitable sky.

Mindel puts it plainly: “You ask the space what’s appropriate, and then you balance that with the client’s needs.” In this case, the apartment would have to be flexible, functioning equally well when the client was there by himself and when he had his two sons, ages six and seven, in tow. The irregularities of what Shelton euphemistically refers to as “the preex-

isting conditions” were in drastic need of resolution, as Mindel goes on to explain: “It was a maximum-density conversion, with a floor plan that didn’t even bother to incorporate the views—just a series of boxlike rooms with very aggressive walls and no flow.”

Reifying their conception of the apartment as open and airy, Shelton and Mindel took down the wall between the living room and an adjacent narrow (in fact, downright bowling-alley-size) bedroom that occupied the exterior corner of the building—the reconfig-

ured living/dining area and open-plan kitchen could now sweep seamlessly from east to west. Then a uniform ceiling height was imposed in the interests of simplicity, closet doors were rescaled to look “more loftlike” and sliding wood panels installed between the master bedroom and the guest room/children’s room. To help organize the main space, five paneled millwork radiator cabinets were built under the array of overscale windows. The dimensions of the room were further reinforced by the borders of the large-





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scale rugs that the partners designed as well as by columns of raw-silk draperies that act as architectural elements and give the room a sharp, clean finish.

"But let's face it," says Mindel, "there's hardly ever any real sense of place in a condo conversion—they usually wind up feeling transient." Here, he felt, aesthetic vindication would lie primarily in the furnishings—a view shared by Shelton. They were equally determined to anchor the rooms—"tie them together"—through the use of robust period pieces consonant with the quality of the



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LEFT: "Several small rooms became the new living room." ABOVE: "The space fully experiences southern light." Thomas Struth's photograph *Waldstrasse auf dem Lindberg* hangs next to an Alexandre Noll torso. Beside the Arne Jacobsen Egg chair is a Jean-Michel Frank floor lamp.





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ABOVE: "I called the kitchen a 'dumpatorium'; it had dark cabinets and junky details. We repainted and added soffits." RIGHT: "The kitchen and dining area are now bright, not depressing." At left is Neshat's *Soliloquy Series*, 1999. Borge Mogensen chairs complement the Prouvé table.

original building. "You wouldn't want anything tentative, delicate or precious here," Shelton emphasizes. "We saw it as a curated space, the antiques bringing a sense of order and structure and strength," Mindel elaborates, "but without in the least overpowering it, since there had to be plenty of serenity, too."

The furniture was purchased in Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, France and England, not to mention the United States. In the entrance hall alone—each too distinctive to be stinted—are a 1920s Fritz Henningsen leather armchair, a 1940s Fontana Arte coatrack, a '40s Pierre Gautier-Delaye mirror, a 1950s Jean Prouvé console and a '50s Carlo Scarpa sconce that is incandescently as much art as lighting. On a par with the exalted furniture are Richard Prince's colorful cowboy, from his series of photographs derived from advertising images, and Matthew Barney's ardently hued *CREMASTER 3: Plumb Line*, a photograph of a kingly-looking cat.

Aside from some contemporary pieces designed by Shelton and Mindel (a sofa in cotton bouclé and cloud-colored wool, which feels like a teddy bear, and two club chairs in epingle, the tough fabric used for the seats in British railway cars), the living room abounds



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in modernist pieces that go beyond the decorative to embody their makers' very philosophy of beauty. A 1950s stainless-steel-framed Poul Kjaerholm daybed reupholstered in biscuit-tufted natural suede floats in the middle of the space, masterfully juxtaposed against a pair of well-worn leather-and-birch chairs designed by Borge Mogensen. They look as good from the back, where they are belted, as from the front, and they imbue the room with the luxury of an Hermès saddle. A low-scale Kjaerholm sofa reupholstered in French postal cloth idles beside a 1960s egg-shaped floor lamp that puts Mindel in

mind of a vintage image—"one of those champagne bubbles that would float down from the sky at the beginning of *The Lawrence Welk Show*."

The witty Egg chair and ottoman, both of them upholstered in cognac leather, were produced by Arne Jacobsen in 1958 for the SAS Royal Hotel in Copenhagen, which he designed. Playing to their shape are two 1960s effervescently free-form cast-glass tables by Danièle Quarante—"They're each the ottoman in glass," Mindel points out.

At the other end of the room a 1930s Le Corbusier low table, a massive slab of steel-based glass, records impres-



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TOP AND ABOVE: "The guest room/children's bedroom is an example of how we tied all of the rooms, the terrace and the city together, thus creating a flow and a unity that had been missing," Mindel points out. *Puppy*, a porcelain vase by Jeff Koons, rests on the Prouvé desk.

"Modernist furniture seemed right for this place." OPPOSITE ABOVE: "The master bedroom was banal." RIGHT: Blue Holmgaard glass brings color to the space, which has a Josef Frank armoire and a Jacques Adnet armchair. *Untitled (three women with earrings)* is by Richard Prince.





sions of distance, reflecting the view as if it were a pool of motionless water. Silhouetted on the window ledge against the south light, an Alexandre Noll torso in fruitwood appears organic—part of the living landscape. And hung between two banks of windows, Thomas Struth's open-ended photograph of a road going off into the horizon—a smoothly scythed green field on one side, a fully leafed tree on the other—makes a kind of second terrace on the skyline.

Prouvé's 1950s Granito dining table, which takes its name from the rose-tint-  
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Mindel puts it plainly: "You ask the space what's appropriate, and then you balance that with the client's needs."





## GOING WITH THE FLOW

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ed granite that constitutes its top, is really a piece of architecture, as solid as it is exuberant. Mørgensen's armless wicker dining chairs, on the other hand, are decidedly light. An early-'70s Verner Panton acrylic sphere floats—another bubble in the air—above the table and, consisting as it does of a blue reflector on top of an orange one, provides a balance of cool light and warm.

The two 1940s Prouvé compass desks in the guest room/children's room—wood-framed, with gray laminate tops and long-spanned cantilevered supports—have been placed back to back, making for both an improvised partners desk and a singular piece of sculpture. The Jacobsen black-leather armed desk chair on its wheeled four-star chrome base vibrates with industrial vigor. A three-armed adjustable Arteluce lamp arches over the epingle-and-Ultra-suede-upholstered trundle bed designed by Shelton and Mindel. The room, when its sliding panels are shut, is snug—at a calculatedly cushioned remove from the city.

The scrupulous master bedroom contains a '40s Jacques Adnet armchair and a '50s Charlotte Perriand hand-sculpted-oak bedside table. For the bed, the partners designed a headboard of natural hemp woven with black horsehair—"very hearty, very forgiving," as Mindel characterizes it. The black grid formed on the hemp by the horsehair echoes the fine lines of the engraving of the map of Paris and its environs that is decouped on the adjacent oak armoire, a '40s piece by Josef Frank. Richard Prince's photographic triptych *Untitled (three women with earrings)* ornaments the wall above the bed—"There's an element of sensuality to it," the client allows. Blue Holmgaard glass from the '60s, in the form of two decanters, serves to bring in a bit of liberating sky.

Shelton and Mindel completed the job in six weeks' time, pleased with their manipulations of volume and light, and trusting that the depth and richness of each of the pieces would be the informing spirit of the place. "And everyone, from the client on down, once they saw it, said they couldn't imagine it any other way," Lee Mindel reports. "It's a space that finally came into its own." □