

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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## The Age of Elegance

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# Rare & Refined

Designer Michael S. Smith pulls out all the stops for a pair of longtime clients

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The library of a Manhattan apartment decorated by Michael S. Smith, with interior architecture by Oscar Shamamian of Ferguson & Shamamian, is lined in antique and reproduction 18th-century Chinese lacquer panels. A Russian neoclassical desk,

commode, and set of bergères join a custom-made eggshell-lacquer cocktail table. **OPPOSITE:** A Peter Lanyon painting is displayed above a circa-1710 *bibliothèque* by André-Charles Boulle in the entrance hall. For details see Sources.



An untitled painting by Franz Kline dominates the living room, which has both northern and southern exposures. Gilt-wood armchairs from Smith's Jasper line are paired with a cocktail table by Magni Home Collection; the parchment-covered stools were purchased at auction, and the custom-made rug is by Beauvais Carpets.





**TOP LEFT:** An Empire mahogany gueridon in the dining alcove is surrounded by William Kent-style armchairs by Jasper. The parquet de Versailles floors are covered in hammered German silver.

**LEFT:** A pair of Willem de Kooning drawings hangs in the kitchen, where Bulthaup cabinets complement *pietra serena* sandstone floors.

**ABOVE:** In the dining room, Brice Marden's *Glyphs* overlooks Louis XVI fauteuils; the antique dining table and the pair of 18th-century French commodes are from Galerie Perrin, and the table lamps are by Christophe Côme from Cristina Grajales Gallery. The exceptional boiserie is by Féau & Cie; Andy Warhol's *Knives* is propped in a corner.



**W**HAT I DO IS THE MOST FUN THING in the world,” says interior decorator Michael S. Smith. “I have the opportunity to embrace my love of history and look at beauty all the time.” Even more than aesthetics, what interests the California-based talent—whose recent projects include a makeover of the Oval Office—is the psychological aspect of design. “I am obsessed with figuring out what is personal and organic to the clients,” he says. “I

want to know their eccentricities and their individual culture.” At the same time, he understands that a home must reflect its location; it’s decorating meets social anthropology.

For the owners of a certain Manhattan apartment, Smith has explored all of the above for the past 17 years. This is the sixth property he’s designed for the couple, who divide their time between Los Angeles, Malibu, London, New York, and Majorca. When they bought the space four years ago, it was a shell. But even though there was nothing, it was everything they wanted. “There are two really unusual features here,” says the wife. “Windows all the way around,



An 18th-century German gilt-wood mirror surmounts a Louis XVI mahogany daybed covered in Le Havre fabric by Jasper in a guest sitting room. **OPPOSITE:** A Russian neoclassical chandelier

and gilt-wood convex mirror from Christie's distinguish the study. The William III-style ottoman is from Sutter Antiques; the painterly circa-1900 Agra carpet was purchased at Sotheby's.

and, oddly enough, silence." The apartment occupies a high floor overlooking Central Park and offers views in every direction, with scant skyscraper obstruction. The living room has both northern and southern exposures, which gives it the openness of a country estate. "You come up from the streets, where it's crazy," she says, "and it's so peaceful and expansive here."

Postwar Manhattan apartments can leave a lot to be desired in terms of proportions, often amounting to a series of low-ceilinged boxes. This one was far better than most, though still not ideal. But Smith had a solution. "Keep the architecture quiet and orderly and rely on finishes, so people feel enveloped," he says. "Even before the furniture is installed, they should perceive the space as one cohesive thing and be comforted by that consistency."

The designer has a gift for inventing a snappy one-liner to sum up the theme for a project—he's coined this one Versailles in the Sky. "I wanted the apartment to have a strict neoclassical look, but I couldn't divorce myself from the reality that it's in a high-rise building," he explains. The owners, who are passionate collectors of fine art and antiques, needed no convincing that 18th-century French furniture was the way to go. Treasures from the Louis XVI period, many of them with significant provenance, anchor the design scheme, cohabiting effortlessly with antiquities and modern paintings.

The couple envisioned an ethereal atmosphere to match the magical views, and that's what Smith delivered. The walls and fabrics are misty tones of pearl-gray, cream, white, and a pale lavender that at first glance looks silver. "We connected the apartment to the





sky rather than to the greenery of the park,” says the designer. The ceilings, for instance, are pearlized to lend them a matte metallic quality. And the ultimate heavenly gesture? A parquet de Versailles-patterned floor made of German silver (a copper-nickel alloy) hand-hammered over wood, which runs from the living and dining rooms to an intimate dining area just off the kitchen. New York architect Oscar Shamamian, a frequent Smith collaborator, designed the pattern, and the modules were made in India. If a silver floor seems like a fantasy, that’s because Smith’s inspiration came from exactly that: a dream. But back on planet Earth, what about the upkeep? “The more they tarnish, the better they look,” says the wife.

A prime example of Smith’s fusing of the modern with the neoclassical is in the dining room: Two rippled-crystal table lamps designed by

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Gold-leaf walls by Nancy Lorenz in the wife's dressing room. A mirror from the estate of Rose Cumming and Davlin tile by Ann Sacks in the adjoining bath. A Jean de Merry étagère in the

husband's bath. Straw-marquetry panels, a glazed-stoneware mirror by Eve Kaplan, and Hervé Van der Straeten sconces in a powder room. OPPOSITE: The guest bath is sheathed in Asher marble by Ann Sacks.





**TOP LEFT:** A mahogany secretary, a Swedish painted chair, and a Giorgio Morandi still life in the master bedroom. **LEFT:** An untitled De Kooning oil hangs above an 18th-century commode flanked by

Russian armchairs from Christie's. **ABOVE:** The master bedroom contains a cocktail table in silver leaf and lacquered gesso from Liz O'Brien; the mirror is 18th-century Swedish.



Christophe Côme in 2003 share space with a pair of commodes made in 1778 for the Château de Bagatelle in Paris. The backdrop for these contrasting gems, and the Brice Marden painting displayed between them, is an icing-white 18th-century-style boiserie produced by Féau & Cie, the renowned French paneling specialists, who replicated designs they had originally made for Maison Jansen in the 1960s.

The only departure from the otherworldly ambience is the study just off the living room, which was inspired by Coco Chanel's famously tawny apartment on Paris's rue Cambon. Smith and his

clients discovered 18th-century lacquer panels similar to Chanel's Coromandel screens on one of their shopping trips and had Féau & Cie reproduce two more to match. The floors, meanwhile, are made of tobacco-color leather. Such idiosyncratic finishes are a testament to more than just Smith's desire to continually challenge his own aesthetic—they illustrate the level of trust between designer and clients. "The homeowners understand and love figuring out what the narrative for a house should be," he explains. "And they're constantly open to new ideas and seeing things in a fresh way." □