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REIMAGINING A CITY APARTMENT

THE CHALLENGE
The former owner renovated it completely, in the opposite direction from your taste. Can you undo the country look?

THE STRATEGY
Find a bold new color for those wide-plank floors, and decorate with a young-but-classic city vibe.



Interior design by ASHLEY WHITTAKER Interview by BOB MORRIS Photographs by FRANCESCO LAGNESE

Natural linen on the tufted sofa and ticking stripe on the settee keep the living room of this New York apartment from being “too stuffy or precious,” says designer Ashley Whittaker. “And I love the rustic bamboo chair in place of a larger armchair. It takes up less space visually, and it adds vintage charm.” OPPOSITE: The Chippendale mirror is meant for a huge room above a mantel or console, but the confident, irreverent placement in the small foyer is a showstopper. Madagascar wallcovering and entry table from John Rosselli. Vaughan lantern.





BOB MORRIS: The word that comes to mind looking at this apartment is 'cheerful.'

ASHLEY WHITTAKER: You wouldn't have said so before we redid it.

Did you ever find 'cheerful' to be a pejorative in Manhattan?

Pejorative? I don't think so. I think people really want it. You know, you want to walk in and feel joy when you come home.

So why so much minimalism and beige in this city?

Yes, there's lots of that. But people really look to me for a colorful punch. This apartment has a traditional quality, although it still feels urban. But not mean urban.

Not a six-inch-stiletto sort of urban.

Exactly. Kind urban. Before we renovated, it was very country and shabby chic. We got rid of the beamed ceilings, except in the kitchen, and we stained the wide plank floors dark chocolate brown to give the whole place more of an edge, an urban sensibility. The floors were actually what drove a lot of the design choices in fabrics and wallcoverings. The hempy sofa fabrics, the striped grass cloth, the linen walls, all have a sense of rustic refinement.

The bamboo-trellis wallpaper in the kitchen is very pretty.

I love the way the trellis pattern looks with the beamed ceiling. They both feel very organic, but it's the citrus green that makes it all pop.

The banquette—did you build it?

Yes. There were a lot of awkward spaces in this apartment, which was made up of three smaller units combined by the previous owner. There was no real flow. You weren't sure which way to go. With just the tiniest bit of tweaking—removing a cabinet here, building in bookcases there—we really made it work.

A young married couple lives here. Did you have to persuade the husband about this palette?

Surprisingly, no. Yes, there are florals, creams, and pale blues, but there are also browns, ticking, and sisal carpet. So there's enough masculinity...

To get away with the rest of your pretty design?

Not to get away with it—to have it look right, honestly.

But the pink was probably beyond the pale for him, as it were.

We got away with some of the pinks with the use of a lot of blue. And then there's the library, which is really his space, and it plays off the living room beautifully by taking all of its creamy, dreamy palette and going into darker blues and oranges.



You grew up in Palm Beach County. Did that affect your aesthetic?

I think that's where I got my love of color. The pale pinks, the oranges. And growing up next to the ocean made me attracted to blues.

Did you wear much black in Florida?

No. I was big on Lilly Pulitzer. I'm not shy about a shocking pink here or there, or an acid green. You can't scare me.

So New York didn't tone you down at all?

It did in the way I dress and in the way I decorate. I like a subtle, tonal look with splashes of color. I don't think it's about all-out color.

It's not about screaming color from every corner of every room.

This place looks as if it was designed by somebody who loves to shop. Do you have favorite places you like to haunt?

I get down to Florida for some great shopping trips on Dixie Highway. Fabulous antiquing. But so much of what's here came from the owners. We call the office our sleeper hit.

With reupholstery of some hand-me-down pieces and a wall of their photo and art collection, we created one of my favorite rooms. At first she said, 'Are you *really* hanging that 1960s concert poster with the paintings and photographs?' I said, 'Are you kidding? It looks great!' Their Chippendale mirror for the front entrance was being restored, and I'd only seen photos of it. Until I actually saw it, I didn't have the full sense of its scale. I had an initial panic attack about how it was going to work in the space. But, honestly, it knocks your socks off when you walk in. It's the first thing you see—it's almost floor-to-ceiling.

What do you do when somebody brings you something that's less than fabulous?

Storage. I say, 'Let's save that for your next house.' But if they're adamant about it, we make it work.

So you don't cluck or wag your finger?

No. If they're that excited about something, I'm going to like it.

Does it take a lot of energy to be so agreeable all the time?

I don't think I'm that agreeable. See, I'm already disagreeing with you.

So who is the nicest kind of client?

One who really looks to you to create a home for them to live in, not a showplace.

And now that your clients are in the apartment with their two little boys, has there been some wear and tear on your creamy, dreamy vision?

The newest addition to their life is a rescue poodle that couldn't be sweeter and really couldn't feel more at home. The poodle is gray. So maybe it's their way of neutralizing my colorful palette.

PRODUCED BY SENG MORTIMER & WHITNEY ROBINSON

ABOVE: A formal dining room was turned into a cozy library. "It's very sunny," says Whittaker, "but we tamed the brightness with Prussian blue"—a half-and-half mix of Twilight and Gentleman's Gray by Benjamin Moore. OPPOSITE: In the breakfast area, Windsor chairs take on a new life with citrus green cushions. Whittaker cut down a Ballard Designs Berkley Trestle table and spray-painted it white. Wallpaper is Baldwin Bamboo by Scalamandré.



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The master bedroom is “soft without being too feminine,” Whittaker says. She balanced the weight of the reproduction four-poster bed from the Federalist with silk wallcovering from Rogers & Goffigon and print curtain fabric from Holland & Sherry that is “pretty, but not girly.” Matouk bedding. Ceramic table lamp, Williams-Sonoma Home. OPPOSITE: On the bedside table, roses and rings in vintage silver vases and porcelain shells.



Dark green walls—Peale Green by Benjamin Moore—are a rich backdrop for the owners' eclectic mix of photographs and art in the home office. A cane coffee table from John Rosselli, woven side tables from Pottery Barn, and the vintage concert poster add to the casual vibe. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES

