



LOFTY ASPIRATIONS

*Decorator Richard Mishaan
transforms a classic
artist's loft in SoHo into a stylish family
home, without losing any of
its bohemian spirit*

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FACING PAGE: John Alexander and Fiona Waterstreet in their downtown Manhattan loft, which was designed by Richard Mishaan. **THIS PAGE:** In the family room, Alexander's painting *Forest* hangs above an 18th-century daybed; the sofa, covered in a mohair by Maharam, and the cocktail table are Mishaan designs; the club chair (left) by George Smith is upholstered in a fabric by Ballard Designs, the bookshelves are by Oly, the rug is by Fort Street Studio, and the walls are painted in Benjamin Moore's London Fog. See Resources.



The living area's oak-and-linen screens are custom made, the pair of antique English club chairs is upholstered in a Donghia linen, the ottoman is from Dienst + Dotter, and the cube is covered in a cowhide by Edeman Leather; the table lamp is by ceramist Suzy Goodelman, and the jute rug is from ABC Carpet & Home.

FACING PAGE, FROM TOP: Vintage armchairs in the dining area are upholstered

in ikats that Waterstreet found abroad, and armchairs from Homer are covered in a David Sutherland fabric; the cabinet

is a 19th-century Korean tea caddy, and the rug is by Fort Street Studio. An

antique French mirror and an Eiffel Tower sculpture from Homer are displayed in the entry; the crocodile sculpture is by

Mike O'Brien. See Resources.

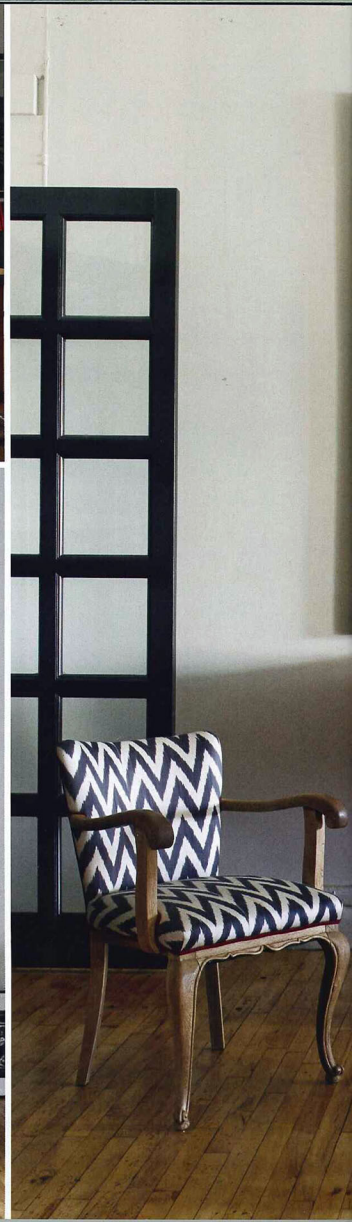




IN 1980, when painter John Alexander moved to New York from his native Texas, it was into one of downtown's great untouched spaces, with 20-foot-high ceilings of pressed tin, amazing light, and virtually no walls. The kitchen area consisted of little more than a "raggedy old stove"; he slept in a storage room in the back. "It was a typical 1970s loft," Alexander says. "Which means that it was pretty raw."

Over the next decade, he walled off a couple of real bedrooms, improved the baths and the kitchen equipment, and divided the space into work and living areas. Still, the place retained its essential "loftiness": There was a wide-open studio in which to paint and an even more enormous space in which to live.

Then, in the early 1990s, when Fiona Waterstreet and her young son, Harrison, came into Alexander's life, what had been a workspace where the artist happened to live immediately became, he says, "a family place." Waterstreet, he adds, took on "the task of making it pretty, of making it more of a home." She brought in her collection of textiles from around the globe, the odd chintz sofa (she is English), and her own artistic sensibilities (once in the fashion business, she is now a ceramist). By all accounts, Harrison grew up there quite happily. Still, Waterstreet says, she always yearned for actual rooms and an English-style coziness that remained lacking.





Alexander's painting *My Garden in Black and Blue* hangs above a 19th-century sofa in the sitting area; the Biedermeier table holds a birdcage filled with porcelain pieces and pottery by Waterstreet, and the floors are original to the loft. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP:** The kitchen's custom-made cabinetry is topped with a counter and backsplash of black slate, the table is from Aero, the stools are from the 1950s, the stove is by Garland, and the antique rug is Persian; drawings by Alexander flank a mixed-media piece by Paul Manes. A collection of artworks, including family portraits, in Waterstreet's office area; the chair is by Eames.





Last year, after what began as a casual conversation with the designer Richard Mishaan, she finally got both wishes, without sacrificing the almost thrilling dimensions of the place or adding even the slightest element of claustrophobia, which was what Alexander feared most.

The Mishaans had known Alexander and Waterstreet socially for years. Richard is an art collector, while his wife, Marcia, is an artist who took a course in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, where Alexander was the teacher (it was a program sponsored by the Corcoran Gallery of Art). Mishaan has sold some of Waterstreet's ceramic pieces in his stylish home-furnishings boutique, Homer, and he owns one of Alexander's stunning oil paintings of water lilies.

"I also knew that the word 'fancy' is not in John's vocabulary, that we needed to dress it up but not go overboard," Mishaan says. "John kept insisting that he loved the open plan, and Fiona kept responding that it echoed." To satisfy both, he came up with ingenious 17-foot-tall screens and metallic open bookshelves to divide the once-vast living area into an entryway, a dining area, a living area, a den—where sports fanatic Alexander can watch his ball games—and a small sitting area off the bedroom and kitchen (a configuration Mishaan likens to a hotel's presidential suite).

The collaboration turned out to be a perfect match. "I'm not the kind of person to take over," Mishaan says. "I could make it too pristine, and it would lose its charm." And while he added a distinct new level of what Waterstreet admirably calls "real design and power," he was also practical. To the screens, custom made from ebonized-oak frames and natural linen panels, he added gallery rods to facilitate an ever-changing installation of small oils, watercolors, and drawings, while the linen serves a much-needed acoustical purpose. The shelves provide a home for the books once stacked on the floor, as well as a showcase for Waterstreet's work. The fabrics, formerly folded in stacks or draped on almost every upholstered surface, became the upholstery itself. A chevron print and an ikat separately covering a pair of French chairs in the sitting room are from Waterstreet's collection, while the suzani on the daybed comes from Homer. The pieces themselves contribute to the unfixed nature of the new "rooms." The chairs, along with zebra print-covered cubes, move into the dining room when needed—even the screens are light enough to move around.

"Richard created rooms but kept them fluid," says Waterstreet, who was so enamored of his changes she was ready to get rid of more than Mishaan would allow. He persuaded her to keep a chintz-covered camelback sofa, for example, and made it fresh by covering it in a vibrant burnt orange, one of the predominant colors in the loft's new palette. Now it is the perfect foil for Alexander's gorgeous blue hollyhock painting that hangs above it in the small sitting room. The combination is so powerful, it made even Alexander a convert: "I had a '70s art gallery mentality. I kept thinking that it was better to show off these big paintings in this big space." But now, he says, after seeing them in situ, "they actually have more power." He says, laughing, "There's a reason people call it *decorating*."

Yes, but the finished product is a marvelous example of decorating without a heavy hand. "This is one of the last undisturbed lofts in the city," Mishaan says, adding he felt strongly that "the metal ceilings and all the wonderful things about the space [including unstained floors] should be preserved." He was also careful not to "pile on" too much color or pattern: "With this kind of artwork, who needs it?" ■



Alexander's studio contains works in progress, an antique drafting table, and a painting table he made himself. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP:** In the master bedroom, a painting by Norman Blum sits atop a custom-made bookcase with an English library. Inside, the sheets are by Thomas Fergusson (ish Linn). The tub in the master bath is by Duravit; the antique mirrors are Italian, and the walls are painted in Benjamin Moore's White Dove. See Resources.