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A TALL ORDER

With architectural designer Thomas Juul-Hansen and decorator Amy Lau, entrepreneur Michael Hirtenstein spends three years combining five raw apartment spaces into an ultracustomized, exactly appointed Manhattan triplex

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The New York residence of businessman Michael Hirtenstein and his wife, Christina, features an outdoor living room crafted of solid mahogany, with a custom-made fire pit; the seat cushions are clad in a Great Outdoors fabric, and the pillows are made of a KnollTextiles stripe. Thomas Juul-Hansen oversaw the apartment's architectural design, Amy Lau was responsible for the furnishings, and Michael Franco of Town and Gardens did the landscaping. For details see Sources.



THERE'S A CLASSIC MOMENT IN THE MOVIE

Mommie Dearest when Faye Dunaway's Joan Crawford arrives to inspect the construction of her lavish Fifth Avenue apartment. In the face of runaway extravagance, she addresses her designer's concern over a blocked view with an imperious directive: "Tear down that bitch of a bearing wall and put a window where it ought to be!"

Michael Hirtenstein appreciates such perfectionist impulses. After combining multiple units in a lower Manhattan apartment building designed by architect Enrique Norten, the high-octane entrepreneur and nightlife impresario was distressed to find a lone structural column—one that supported several floors of the 13-story glass tower—interrupting the flow of his double-height living room. Despite the potential nightmare of redistributing the column's load, his response was categorical: Take it down.

"The design team looked at me like I had three heads," Hirtenstein recalls, laughing. "But they said, 'Let's get the structural engineer up here and figure it out.' In the end removing that column made the space and made the apartment."

IN PROGRESS



Architectural designer Thomas Juul-Hansen and decorator Amy Lau understand how difficult it can be to say no to their enterprising, risk-defying client. "Michael pushed us to do things we'd never done before," says Juul-Hansen, an alumnus of Richard Meier's office known for his deft handling of pristine planes and volumes. "He has a distinct vision of what he wants and a fearlessness and exactitude when it comes to realizing that vision."

A serial collector of trophy properties in Manhattan, Hirtenstein has previously owned a high-profile penthouse in the Time Warner Center and spectacular townhouses in



BEFORE

Top: Hirtenstein had a column removed to maximize the wide-open feel of the living room, which is painted in a Benjamin Moore white and ringed by curtains made of a Knoll Luxe fabric. The two seating areas are anchored by Vladimir Kagan sofas, which—like most of the new furnishings—were custom made; the one at left joins an agate-top low table with a bronze-and-brass base by Silas Seandel and a pair of Kagan swivel chairs beneath a Lindsey Adelman chandelier, while the other faces a 1960s cocktail table from Todd Merrill Antiques. The carpets are by Fort Street Studio, and the piano and stools in the back corner are by Based Upon. **Right:** Christina and Michael on one of their terraces. **Opposite:** The wall above the bar and dining area showcases a plaster relief created by artist Malcolm Hill.





Greenwich Village and on Gramercy Park. Seven years ago he was driving downtown when he came upon a billboard promoting the new Norton building, One York; the ad featured an image of a pool on a terrace high above the street. “I’m a Pisces, so I love the water. I knew I had to have it,” he says.

And have it he did. Consolidating five separate apartments into a showstopping three-floor spread that totals 8,600 square feet, with an additional 5,500 square feet of outdoor space, he devised the ultimate bachelor pad—which promptly became a newlyweds’ nest when Hirtenstein married his longtime girlfriend, Christina Hale, in 2012.

The job of transforming all that raw real estate into a cohesive, welcoming home fell to Juul-Hansen, who developed a fluid floor plan that comprises a series of intimate rooms radiating off the lofty living area, with no awkward transitions or residual traces of the developer’s original scheme. But consolidation was just the beginning. “The challenge,” the designer says, “was to maintain the quiet luxury of light, air, and space while creating bravura architectural moments with incredibly sumptuous materials.”

Those blockbuster moments include a stunning outdoor living room of solid mahogany (steamed and bent in the manner of yacht construction) with seating and storage, a fire pit, a built-in grill, and views of two Manhattan icons—the Empire State

Top: In the master suite, Lau grouped a circa-1950 Kagan sofa with a pair of chairs and a matching ottoman—upholstered in a Romo fabric—around a cocktail table by Based Upon; the curtains are made of a Christopher Hyland fabric, lined with a Création Baumann textile, and the hide rug is by Kyle Bunting. **Opposite, from top:** A 1960s FontanaArte fixture hangs in the dining area, where a Montigo gas fireplace is set into a wall of gray travertine; a suite of custom-made Kagan chairs covered in a Moore & Giles leather surrounds the table, which has a bronze base by Seandel and displays glass orbs by Jeff Zimmerman and bronze vessels by David Wiseman. The kitchen, outfitted with rosewood cabinetry, has chandeliers by Brand van Egmond, ovens by Miele, and refrigerators by Sub-Zero; the wood bowls on the island are from Espasso.





Building to the north and the new One World Trade Center to the south. There's also a pop-up television for Hirtenstein's frequent alfresco viewings of movies and sporting events. (And just in case his guests are enjoying a swim when the game goes into overtime, there's a projection screen that rises magically from the shrubbery planted alongside the slate-edged, mosaic-lined pool.)

Juul-Hansen's architectural tours de force continue inside the apartment, where massive planes of silvery travertine, richly veined marble, blackened steel, Italian leather, tamo ash, and artisanal plaster define individual rooms. Even the apartment's staircase is treated like a theatrical showpiece, its steel steps wrapped in pale oak, with integrated LED lighting on each riser and a sinuous railing of hand-carved rosewood. "This place has a level of articulation and detail unlike any project I'd ever worked on," Juul-Hansen says.

Not to be outdone, Lau decorated with bespoke furnishings equal to the architecture in quality, craftsmanship, and ambition. Her assured hand is perhaps most evident in the 19-foot-high living room, where she tempered the soaring scale with two enormous silk rugs (one round, the other oval) that delineate separate seating areas, each furnished with a custom-made Vladimir Kagan sofa, while a single majestic Lindsey Adelman glass-orb chandelier floats overhead. In the adjoining dining

area, which sits beneath a monumental abstract plaster relief by artist Malcolm Hill, two enormous golden-bronze blocks by Silas Seandel support a nearly 13-foot-long tabletop of laminated glass. All the furnishings were developed and refined on-site with models and templates to ensure harmony of scale and proportion.

For one corner of the living room Hirtenstein commissioned a sculptural minimalist black-and-silver-resin piano from the London art-and-design group Based Upon. Its striking organic form is echoed in the cocktail table the studio crafted for the master suite, which features a cashmere-and-silk carpet so impossibly plush that a bed seems hardly necessary.

"Michael is obsessed with tactile quality and dimensionality. You can see it in the exquisite fabrics and window treatments, which are like couture creations," says Lau, who has worked with Hirtenstein on three previous residences. "He definitely likes bling, but the bling here has restraint—it's a subtle knockout."

Indeed, the true brilliance of Hirtenstein's home rests in its dizzying array of luxe surfaces, textiles, and fixtures, each one a quiet triumph of rich materiality and ingenious construction. "I want everything I touch to be extraordinary in some way," he says. "Even the shelves in my closets are totally lined in leather." And needless to say, there's not a wire hanger in sight. □



Top: The slate-paved pool terrace is furnished with Summit tables and chaise longues. **Right:** Juul-Hansen opened up the stairwell, adding white-oak steps with recessed lighting and a glass balustrade topped by a hand-carved rosewood rail; a custom-made light fixture by jGoodDesign descends through the center, while an installation by ceramic artist Jennifer Prichard enlivens the walls. **Opposite:** Lau hung a circa-1970 chandelier from Rewire Gallery above the Blatt Billiards pool table and paired an Arredoluce floor lamp with an Olivier Mourgue double lounge chair, both from the '60s.



Clockwise from top left: Graphic gray marble lines the walls, cabinetry, and shower in Michael's bath; the porcelain stool is from Flair Home Collection. Christina's dressing room boasts a handblown glass chandelier by jGoodDesign above a rosewood-and-leather island with a built-in seat; the shelves and closets are backed with gold mirror. Rosewood and tamo ash frame the master suite's bed and headboard, which is upholstered in a Romo fabric and appointed with pendant lights by Rewire Gallery; the bedding is by Matouk, the cashmere blanket is by Anichini, the ottomans are circa-1970 designs by Giancarlo Piretti, the sculpture is a '70s work by Jack Arnold, the Kagan chaise is clad in an Old World Weavers fabric, and the carpet is by Luke Irwin. Namibian Rose marble sheathes the walls and tops the lacquer vanity in Christina's bath; the Rapsel tub has Dornbracht fittings.



DESIGN WISDOM

WORK WITH SCALE: Lau tempered the size—and hard edges—of the vast glass-box living room by installing soft, rounded carpets to create more intimate seating areas defined by sensuously curved Vladimir Kagan sofas. The large chandelier helps fill the void overhead.

MAKE NATURAL SELECTIONS: Boldly patterned wood, richly veined marble, and full-grain leather add visual texture to rooms.

STEP IT UP: By opening the stairwell and adding a glass balustrade and backlit risers, along with a three-story cascading light fixture and an eye-catching art piece for the walls, Juul-Hansen and Lau elevated the steps from functional to fantastic.

STRIKE A BALANCE: Select vintage furnishings complement the apartment's elegant custom-made pieces while lending a welcome sense of history.

MIND THE DETAILS: It pays to pay attention to little things like switch plates and outlets. Here, Lau had all of them faux-finished as wood or marble for a seamless look.

