

Luxury Listings NYC

RAISING EYEBROWS

INSIDE GEORGE WHIPPLE'S MIDTOWN HOME

NYC VS. LA

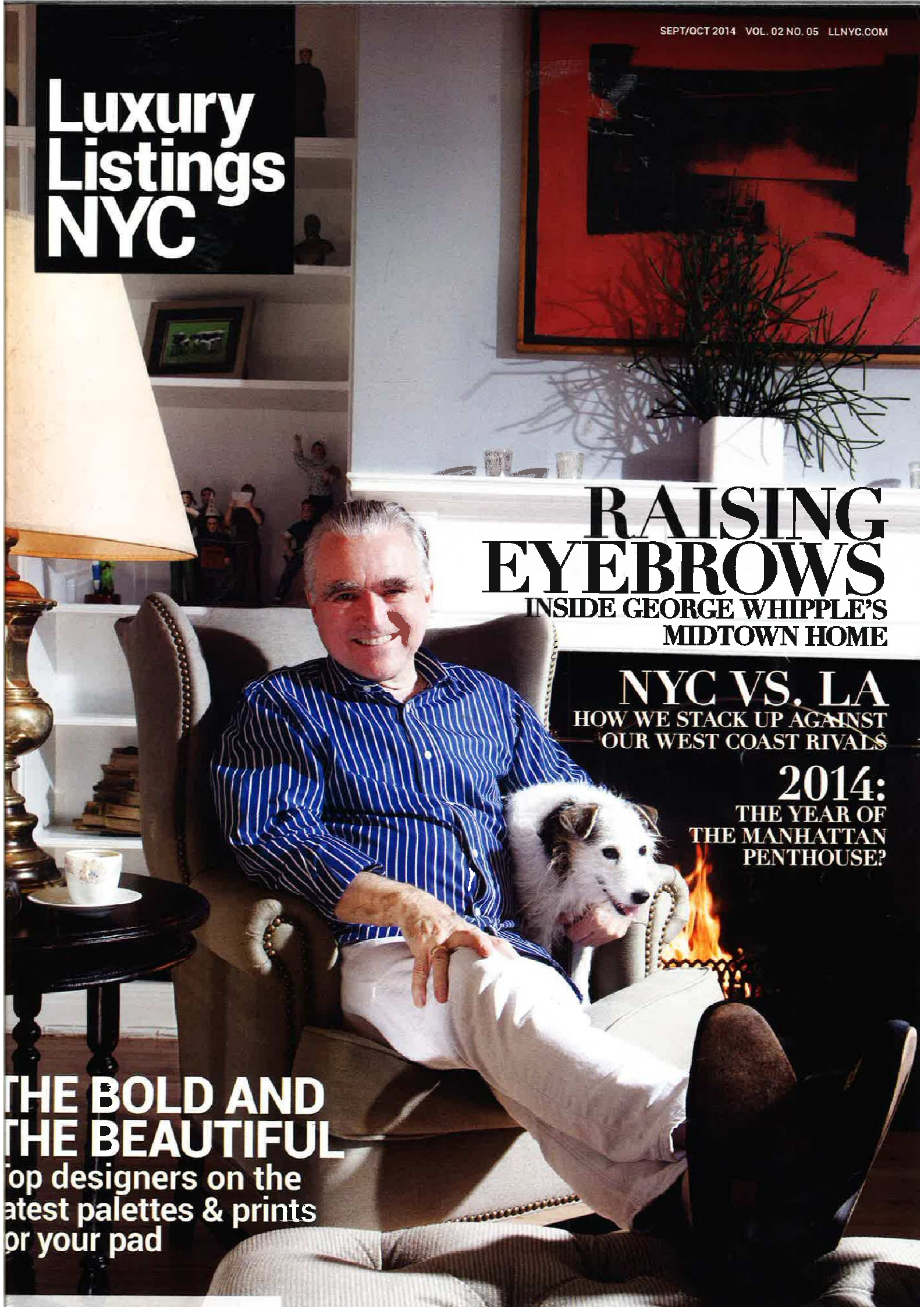
HOW WE STACK UP AGAINST OUR WEST COAST RIVALS

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(Right): A photo by Elger Esser picks up the color scheme of the living room. (Below): A view from the living room, facing south.



A renovation all in the family

A top designer and her contractor husband join forces to create a lovely, livable home on the UWS

BY MICHELE KEITH

The tiny footprint embedded in the mosaic-floored foyer says it all: This is a home with children. But don't get the wrong idea—there are no school calendars on the fridge, skateboards in the hall or tortilla-chip crumbs ground into the carpet here. The expansive Upper West Side home of interior designer Eve Robinson is done in her signature fashion, where whimsy, nuance and historically-grounded contemporary style combine to create a highly livable space.

"Of course we have rules," said Robinson.

"Though they're bendable," interjects her husband, upscale contractor Josh Wiener, motioning to the bikes in the dining room, ready for a spin in the park.

"No shoes in the house, and food stays in the kitchen," she elaborates. "But no [place] is off-limits to the kids."

Take that footprint in the foyer. It was made many years ago, when the couple was creating the home of their dreams. "My oldest son was four when we were laying the tiles," Robinson recalls. "He ran across it while the grout was still wet. I'd probably have removed it in someone else's home, but it looked so sweet we decided to leave it."

In some ways, the footprint, though unnoticeable to most, embodies the relaxed feel of the home. The residence that Robinson and Wiener created for themselves and their two sons—Nathaniel, 18 and Aden, 15—is

sophisticated yet comfortable, meticulously crafted but not precious. It's furnished with an mix of vintage pieces, yet maintains a laid-back feel. It's the result of a partnership of two likeminded people; Robinson and Wiener are the kind of couple who finishes each other's sentences.

Robinson has been creating innovative, timeless spaces since she established Eve Robinson Associates in 1990. She's garnered kudos—including spots on top designer lists in *New York*, *House Beautiful* and *New York Spaces*—and her work has been featured in innumerable magazines, books and TV shows.

Wiener opened SilverLining Interiors, a general contracting and construction management firm, in 1987. His work runs the gamut from the much buzzed-about 80-foot interior slide at 150 Nassau—it descends the entire height of a three-story penthouse—to mantels, staircases and myriad other constructions and finishes. Like his wife, his work has been featured in numerous publications, such as *The New York Times Magazine*, *Interior Design* and *Dwell*. While Robinson declined to name some of her high-profile clientele, Wiener's bold-faced clients have included Tom Cruise, Sigourney Weaver, Matt Lauer and Julia Roberts.

Both born-and-bred Upper West Siders, the couple grew up within a few blocks of each other—but didn't meet until they were at Vassar College. "She barely noticed me,"



Biedermeier chairs ring the mahogany table in the dining room. (Above): The hand-painted squares on the walls of the breakfast room are inspired by the quilts of Gee's Bend. (Opposite): Vases add color to the master bedroom.



"We kept thinking about it, envisioning what we would do."

—Interior designer
Eve Robinson

Nathaniel, Aden, Eve and Jash in their family room. (Above right): A detail of the Manolo Valdés print in the dining room. (Right): Though filled with antiques, the feel of the home is relaxed.



PHOTOGRAPHED BY STUDIO SCRIVO

recalls Wiener. As luck would have it, however, they reconnected at a friend's party five years after graduation and this time, something clicked.

Married in 1992, they inhabited a small space on the Upper West Side until finally, after rejecting some 100 apartments ("We either liked it and couldn't afford it—" said Wiener, "—or didn't like it and could afford it," finishes Robinson), they found the "Holy Grail" of New York real estate, as they put it: a classic six, close to food meccas Fairway Market, Citarella and Zabar's; in an area known for excellent schools; nearly equidistant to Riverside and Central Parks. "The apartment was a bit of a stretch financially, taking almost everything we had," said Wiener. "But we got it."

So enamored were they with the 1,600 square-foot apartment—the nicely-sized rooms had beautiful proportions; the extra-large windows brought in expansive views of the city and swaths of sunlight—they didn't notice that their building, the Wellston, was designed in 1925 by Rosario Candela, perhaps the most famous pre-war architect of luxury apartment buildings in New York City. "It was several years later, when we read an article about his work posted in the mail room, and there was our house!" Robinson said.

Next door to the couple's apartment was a rare classic five that they coveted from day one, believing its annexation would complete their dream house. "We kept thinking about it, envisioning what we'd do with it, drawing plans on restaurant napkins," said Robinson.

In 1999, the same year their second child was born, they approached their neighbors. "We asked if they would move if we found them something comparable that they liked," said Wiener. "They said yes. We found them a wonderful new home just a few floors up. And everyone was happy."

First came a gut renovation, which transformed the classic six into the private rooms and the classic five into the public spaces. At the top of the must-have list was a huge eat-in kitchen, which they created by combining the existing kitchen with a maid's room and bath. From the start, Robinson's goal was to maintain the original pre-war feeling—high ceilings, cove moldings and steel doors—and still make it timeless.

"We speak the same language," said Wiener. The 3,100-square-foot apartment, which now constitutes dining and living rooms, an office/guest room, eat-in kitchen, a family room and four bedrooms, was completed

DESIGNER DIGS

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in less than a year—and on budget, something the couple say forced them to be more creative.

While the home certainly shows off the couple's artistry, that was never their intent. "We don't 'tour' our home for business," said Wiener. "It's strictly for us, our family and friends."

As Robinson does for her clients, she imbues the spread with a sense of freshness and classicism. Starting with the foyer—which, in addition to the footprint, features an antique mahogany Anglo-Raj bench, stark against the luminous, trowel-dragged, stucco Veneziano walls—it's all about juxtaposition and personal preference.

Entering the spacious living room—the walls paneled in off-white, 20-inch squares of fiber board—one is struck by the restrained simplicity and the welcoming feel. Centered between two enormous windows is a quilted, leather-upholstered English Arts & Crafts loveseat; to the left are sturdy chairs that Wiener found in the basement, destined for the dumpster, and recovered. The René Gabriel latticework chairs opposite the windows are

cushioned with an informal checkerboard pattern; a Biedermeier toiletry cabinet serves as an end table. Everything is a different color and texture—and hails from varying time periods in several countries—yet work together. Most important: Everything is easy to live with.

"It hasn't changed much in the past 14 years, but now that the boys are older, they're beginning to voice their opinions about the décor," Robinson said. "In fact, we recently sat down with them to critique the entire place." One of the redos already begun at their suggestion, which Robinson says is "right on target," is the family room. The current bold-against-neutral palette will become a more refined lavender and grey one; and basic school-room cabinets will be upgraded to natural walnut.

While a mélange of antiques grace the living room, contemporary pieces reign in the bedrooms. "We recently traded a four-poster queen for a king with blue leather headboard for a fresher, cleaner look," Robinson said of the master. The boys' rooms are equally minimal, brightened with colorful desks and blankets that pick up on the Roman shades' stripes—grass green, lime, grey and white for Nathaniel; red, blue, yellow and white for Aden.

Robinson and Wiener say they love what they do because, as Robinson explains, "Every project is different. We're always learning something, not just about decorating, but construction, [and] building relationships with people."

Both are enthusiastic about their current projects—a Connecticut farmhouse, a San Francisco townhouse and apartments on

Fifth and Park Avenues for her; real estate developer and investment guru Billy Macklowe's new home, an Upper East Side Beaux Arts townhouse and a 15 CPW penthouse for him—and, looking back, they claim doing their own home was easy.

"We did an enormous amount of pre-planning," said Robinson. "All the drawings were ready, the selections were made."

"And, of course, we had a great decorator and contractor!" Wiener adds. **LL**



The buffet dates to the 1950s. (Left): The sculpture, from Africa, was a gift from Robinson's father.