







EN DESIGNERS SPEAK of "bringing the outdoors in," 're usually referring to bucolic themes and countrified ils. In cities, by contrast, most people prefer to keep the oors out. But for an apartment overlooking New York City's nercy Park, designer Bennett Leifer envisioned rooms that Id pay homage to the environment beyond the windows—only the trees and sky, but also the architecture, arts, and are that have lent their spirit to the historic district. "We aiming for a capsule of Gramercy Park life—refined and ized, but totally unpretentious," says Leifer.

the clients, it offered the perfect setting to put down roots in the bustle of the big city. Having grown up abroad, they it a place with a strong sense of home. "They wanted it to special but easy," the designer says, adding that it needed to mmodate extended family, international friends, and busiassociates as graciously as it would just the two of them.

that end, Leifer set out to design rooms at once elegant and n. "The palette is precious but patinaed," he says. "None e gold is bright and shiny; it's all oxidized or oil-rubbed." hed silk velvets, polished stone, and antique rugs likewise mer softly. The silk living room curtains are gathered a nonchalant slouch. And in a nod to the eclecticism of the hborhood's architectural styles, Leifer included furnishthat span two-and-a-half centuries. In the living room, for aple, 18th-century antiques mix it up with Gustavian, mid-century, and contemporary pieces.

fer had just started his own firm when he landed this projhaving previously worked in the offices of Robert A.M. a, Juan Pablo Molyneux, and Scott Snyder. "I learned a bout different design sensibilities and business models," ys of the experience. He also acquired the confidence necry to take on a project of this scope. "In a 4,000-square-foot tment, not everything can feel special, whatever your budhe says. "It would get overwhelming."

tunately, the clients were interested in acquiring pieces d on personality as much as pedigree. "For them, it's less it price than about their own aesthetic and emotional

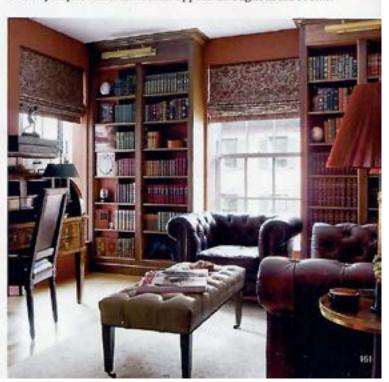


response," he says. This allowed the designer to propose a sophisticated rethinking of the high-low ethos. Above a walnut console in the living room, for example, hangs an unrestored mirror, its matte gesso frame edged in a gilt fillet. A neoclassical plaster bust stands cheek to cheek with a 21st-century reproduction. In the library, custom walnut millwork surrounds contemporary leather chairs.

A restrained, neutral palette unites the mix while linking it to the world outside. In the living room, which overlooks park and sky, Leifer relied on earth tones and luminous blues. He worked with deep reds and browns in the library, which has views of an old brick mansion. The dining room glows with light reflected off its gold-leaf wallcovering.

The verdant park offered a jumping-off point for other flights of fancy. Stylized natural forms appear throughout the rooms:











in egg- and pinecone-shaped lamps; in faux-bamboo furniture; in cut-crystal sculptures; in vases the color of a late-afternoon sky. A lampshade is bedecked in pheasant feathers; a Lobmeyr mirror is wreathed in crystal flowers. Fabric patterns, too, are inspired by nature, from the feather motif on the living room pillows to the peony-strewn curtains in the guest bedroom.

An avid art collector himself, Leifer served as an adviser to these clients—and here, too, his philosophy of balancing instinct with investment prevails. "It's not about what will be in the auction when you pass away," he says of selecting works. "It's about living with things you love." The walls display works by such modern painters as Ellsworth Kelly and Willem de Kooning, along with contemporary pieces by Assaf Shaham and Simen Johan. Several images—elephants on back-painted glass; a watercolor cityscape—reflect the clients' South Asian heritage.

Gramercy Park is private, enclosed by a wrought-iron fence to which residents of the surrounding buildings possess the only keys, adding to the sense that it's a world set apart. But no neighborhood exists in a bubble, least of all in Manhattan, where edgy energy infuses the very air. Leifer celebrates this, too, with clever, cutting-edge details, such as powder room wallpaper laser-printed to mimic Victorian plaster moldings and a digitally manipulated peacock photograph that presides over the dining room.

By synthesizing such carefully curated details, Leifer has created an environment as stimulating as it is restorative—an apartment whose walls are not so much barriers to the world outside as filters that welcome in the best of what it has to offer.