

This feature (except the final interview) is an excerpt from *New York Contemporary: Grade Architecture and Interiors* by Thomas Hickey and Edward Yedid (The Monacelli Press, \$140). Published here courtesy of Monacelli Press, it has been edited to accommodate *Urbis*' style.

Living with art

In this apartment, designed by Grade New York for an art-loving couple, proportions and flow are just as important as are surfaces and detail. Art, however, reigns supreme and in complete unison.

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In the dining room, Warren Platner's classic chairs surround a custom table. On the ceiling, suede upholstered petals frame a shower of lights. A coffee table of kiln-fused glass and cast bronze, designed by Stacklab, slips neatly into the living room. Along the window perimeter are a pair of Hervé Langlais club chairs and an Ox chair by Hans Wegner.

Trust is design's great intangible. Once it is implicit, the project has the best possible chance of ending up beyond the client's wildest dreams. It also ensures that the process is a joy every step of the way. With this Brazil-based couple, trust existed before the start, thanks to a shared connection with a one-time GRADE colleague. The confidence it engendered became the catalyst for every decision in the couple's art-filled pied-à-terre in Sir Norman Foster's tower in far-west Chelsea, practically on the Hudson River. For art lovers as passionate as these two, no other building and no other neighbourhood made sense.

With interior and exterior architecture as distinctive as Foster's, it is natural to take advantage of the design cues and opportunities they provide. The sweep of the living room soffit profile, for instance, sparks many of the custom design details. The same is true for the pale, golden champagne tint of the structural framework. As for the panoramic views of the skyline, river and harbour, what could be more inspiring?

The entry gallery, the through-line between the public and private areas, showcases just some of the art and iconic contemporary furnishings assembled over the course of an especially exciting design process. A stepped crown moulding incorporates the curve of the soffit, introducing a touch of tradition filtered through a modern perspective. With ceilings leafed in white gold and walls panelled in ash bleached and stained to emphasise the open grain, the gallery is warm, luxurious and just texturally interesting enough to heighten the experience of the group of works it displays. They include pieces by Annie Morris, Josef Albers, Ingrid Donat, Perrin & Perrin, Dan Flavin and others we



On the kitchen wall, Brent Wadden's *Untitled* adds another variation on the recurring black horizontals. Horizontal reveals bring a clear geometry to the flush cabinet doors, complementing hide-upholstered stools by Powell & Bonnell. Works by Mary Heilmann, Joel Shapiro and Ed Ruscha add a sophisticated note.





curated, including its centrepiece, Lucio Fontana's *Concetto Spaziale*, a most brilliant finishing touch.

The living room encompasses two seating areas oriented to capture panoramic views that sweep east and south. Each grouping mixes pieces by some of the 20th century's best-known makers with custom designs that enhance the art-above-all point of view. A captivating painting by Ellen Gallagher, the very first work selected for this project, informs the room's elements from form to colour palette.

Stationary wall wings separate the living and dining rooms without a more formal closure; these incorporate the soffit profile, as do the details of the cowhide-lined built-in units. Over the dining table, a petal-like arrangement of suede-wrapped panels and delicate descending lights flowers on the ceiling. The library houses an ever-expanding collection of catalogues and art books, as well as comfortable seating and lighting for serious readers. The shelves float on a wall of fabric-wrapped panels set to reveal shadow lines created by a subtle undulation.

In the master bedroom, black and gold accents highlight a tonal palette of creams, off-whites, light greys. A fantastic tangle of a lamp by Jean Royère spreads its vines across the hallway; its bold black lines prefigure those in the bedroom's Matisse aquatint. Its curves, as well as Foster's, influence the custom bedroom furnishings. The twin beds in the guest room pick up on the same detail.

It is rare and wonderful to share such trust with clients. When it happens, there's no predicting what art can come of it. And not just the works of art themselves, but the art of furniture, of curating, of placement, and above all, the art of living. ■

By the window, Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec's anodised aluminium *Chairs* emphasises the room's height next to a cast-aluminium console that mimics the colour. On the focal wall, Rogan Gregory's unique terrazzo sculpture forms a corolla around George Condo's *Female Composition*. The chairs are *Platner Dining Chairs* (available in NZ from Studio Italia).



Lucio Fontana's *Concetto Spaziale* pops against walls panelled in flat-cut, custom-bleached ash, finished with just a hint of charcoal. Eric Schmitt's *Dragee Console* of patinated bronze and marble makes a strong, functional statement below. Shelves for the clients' collection of art books and exhibition catalogues float off the library wall of fabric-wrapped panels set in a stepped formation.



A backdrop for Dimorestudio's sconces, the custom headboard reinterprets the curve of the soffit in yet another way. Overhead, Ingo Maurer's Lil Luxury ceiling light introduces a touch of gold, repeated by Franck Evennou's set of three nesting tables.



Urbis speaks to Grade New York's founders, Edward Yedid (pictured left) and Thomas Hickey, about the ideas behind this project.

What were the clients' main requests?
Edward Yedid (EY): We learned how important art and design are to them, and their preferences in terms of palette. They wanted their home to feel calm. When we met, the husband was dressed from head to toe in softly toned cashmere. That's what the apartment needed to feel like. It's located on the Hudson River so we sought to capitalise on the water views as well. We selected the furniture and works of art, but took our curation role further by treating the architecture and interior as works of art, too. The dining room highlights our concept. We designed the table to celebrate the views of the water outside. Above, a suede-wrapped ceiling canopy – which helps to make the space more intimate – is shaped like a puddle. The textured surface behind the canopy gives the impression of water. The carpet below makes it feel as though the ceiling has almost flowed onto the floor.

How did you find yourselves fulfilling the roles of designers/art curators?
EY: I've collected art for 20 years. Through that process, I've gained a great amount of knowledge and built relationships with galleries along the way. Whenever possible, we want to be the art advisors for our design projects. You're already working with the client so closely on every aspect of their project, so being part of the art process at an early stage can have a strong impact. We always say we want architecture and interiors to have equal representation, to inform each other, and art is also a big player. Art adds a level of interest and character to any project: attributes you can't get with furniture and accessories alone. In the case of 551 West 21st Street, we knew the clients cared about art but we didn't know we'd be advising on it from the get-go. It was an organic process instead. The first piece we advised on



was the green painting in the living room by Ellen Gallagher. I flicked [the client] an image of it via text and he loved it. Then the journey really began. Together, we collected about 10 different works across various scales, styles and prices.

A residential context is obviously very different from a white-walled gallery – how does that affect the curation?
EY: Instead of relying on white walls, we came up with the idea of using panels of ash wood. They're bleached and stained white but the texture comes through. They don't fight with whatever you put in front of them and are more interesting than plain white walls are. It was the first time we'd worked with this material and now we're doing something similar for a new project.

In that case, though, the space won't benefit from wood panelling so we're working with a plaster artist to mimic the idea.

How do you feel about purely decorative objects versus functional art and sculptures – say, a sculpture that doubles as a seat?
Thomas Hickey (TH): The key term in all our work is 'balance', whether that's balancing architecture with interiors or interiors with art. We wouldn't want to create an environment with only functional objects nor with only objective art – a gallery you can't engage with. That's why it's such an advantage to be a one-stop shop, taking care of every element to make sure everything has equal weight. ■

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