

Robb Report Home & Style

LUXURY RESIDENCES AND FINE DESIGN

JULY/AUGUST 2015



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A CURTCO MEDIA PUBLICATION

FUTURE PERFECT: LOOKING FORWARD WITH DESIGN LUMINARY HOLLY HUNT

























Jorge S. Arango

JULY 20, 2015

High above Manhattan, this Jamie Drake–designed penthouse is anything but a shrinking violet.

When it was coined in 1889, the word sporty meant sportsmanlike. But by the 1960s, the term also had become associated with the look of sports cars—fast, flashy, sleek—and not long thereafter it took on a certain fashion sense, connoting a trim, fitted, and confidently youthful aesthetic. So when interior designer Jamie Drake describes the couple who hired him to outfit this spacious one-bedroom loft in New York City as “casual and sporty in nature,” he is suggesting they are more Roberto Cavalli chic than Brooks Brothers classic.

Indeed, this is a principal reason people flock to Drake, arguably the premier colorist designer of our day: His fashionableness infuses even his most traditional interiors. Moreover, his clients admire the modernist lens through which he filters his comprehensive knowledge of fine- and decorative-arts history.

This home is Drake’s second project with a thirtysomething pair who, he notes, “wanted more space and, very specifically, outdoor space.” To that end, the couple purchased an apartment near the previous residence he had designed for them. The new penthouse duplex measured 4,500 square feet and featured expansive terraces on the upper level and roof that provided an additional 1,150 square feet. “It’s perched atop an industrial warehouse building erected in the 1920s,” he says. “The views are stunning, with three aspects, facing east, west, and south.”

Fortuitously, Drake recalls, “the apartment had been renovated by previous owners in an excellent way, utilizing high-end finishes and superb details. We built upon that.” Their updates had included elegant honed travertine marble in the dining area, a green marinace marble floor in the master suite, Macassar ebony paneling in the library, and cerused oak millwork in the master bedroom. Drake edited some of these down, removing portions of the ebony to make the library feel brighter, and creating upholstered panels to break up the oak in the master, imparting a suppler couture sensibility.

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The designer then enhanced the architectural envelope with finishes and details that personalized the interiors for the owners. “I wanted it to be unmistakable when you walked into the apartment that you were in our home,” says the wife. “The space here is incredibly dramatic. With the high ceilings, stone floors, and huge windows, there was real potential for it to feel very cold. We wanted bright and warm colors and comfortable furniture to help combat that.”

In particular, the couple strongly desired a purple-based palette. Drake knew the bold color would need modulating. “We mixed it with mustard in the living room and adjacent library, and in the kitchen–dining room,” he explains.

“In the bedroom we went softer, pairing it with a scheme of fresh aqua. On the upper level the purple returns as accents with vibrant teal.”

Drake’s deployment of the various purple shades was key; flat coats of paint would not have conveyed the requisite stylishness. Instead, he incorporated the unapologetic hue in myriad ways: hand-troweled Venetian plaster walls by Alpha Workshops and sumptuous Dedar draperies in the living room; lush mohair on a living room ottoman; glossy lacquered nightstands from Holly Hunt in the master bedroom.

Similarly, the designer deftly calibrated sheen and shimmer, conveying a certain level of dash while sidestepping glitz. This is evident in the library’s suite of swiveling lounge chairs, which are upholstered in a Jim Thompson fabric that exudes a mellow gold glow. Discreet sparkle also emanates from the tiled kitchen backsplash and the silk fibers woven into various bespoke carpets. On the home’s upper story, Drake bestowed on the glass-enclosed den a bronzed fireplace that he describes as “a polished and sophisticated take on the building’s industrial roots.”

The owners’ personalities come through not only in the colors and textures but also in the choice of artwork. Drake notes that the couple tend to favor photography—the image above the living room sofa is from Roberto Dutesco’s The Wild Horses of Sable Island series—and what he calls “pieces with a very vibrant character.” Examples include a Damien Hirst in the master bedroom, a Sol LeWitt in the foyer, and a Paul Jenkins in the dining room.

Another request by the couple was not one but two kitchens—one inside and another outdoors on the roof. For these spaces, Drake collaborated with the kitchen designer Matthew Quinn, of Design Galleria in Atlanta. “The owners most definitely use their kitchen, which is unusual for New York,” says Quinn. “They’re a young couple, and they like having the flexibility to entertain intimately or in large numbers.”

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“The indoor kitchen reconfiguration was our greatest challenge,” notes Drake. “We removed a bath to accomplish this.” That extraction not only allowed for the inclusion of an eight-burner range, two convection ovens, a microwave, wine storage, and two dishwashers, but also opened up space for a walk-in pantry that is accessed through a secret door in the millwork. Quinn hid the refrigerator and freezer behind paneling, and the tiled backsplash conceals an easy-to-reach compartment for stowing small appliances. The room’s composition is completely custom, down to the mustard yellow high-gloss enamel cabinetry.

Bespoke details continue in the rooftop kitchen. The island incorporates a Pyrolave lava stone countertop in a custom orange glaze—a departure from the interior palette. Drake filled the terrace with seating and dining areas appointed in Christian Liaigre teak furniture and custom upholstery. Potted plantings by David Seiter, principal of Brooklyn’s Future Green Studio, lend a garden feel to the space.

Outdoors and in, the home’s vibrant spaces reveal their owners’ true colors. “It’s hard to pick a favorite spot,” says the husband, “but if I had to, I guess I’d go with the second floor—inside in winter and outside in summer. The views are spectacular in every direction, and the ability to sit in front of a fire and still feel that level of access to the New York City skyline is truly special. Plus, it’s a clear example of that balance we were hoping to strike.” The wife agrees. “We were looking to balance the opulence with a sense of comfort,” she adds. The very definition of sporty, if ever there was one.

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