Fresh Canvas

Decorator Katie Lydon conjures up a masterpiece for an art-loving client on Central Park West

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Hushed Beauty
In the living room, tufted Roman Thomas settee faces a 1950s Palm Jutti-designed cocktail table; the Wassily Kaplan lounge chair and ottoman are covered in Rogers & Goffigon’s Carton. Signor Pelle’s Unito, a gesso, acrylic, epoxi inlaid and enamel on paper work from 2006 is displayed on the wall. See Resources.
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For the interiors, Lee hired British-born decorator Kate Lydon. “It was a clean white space, which is what Helen wanted so that she could centre the decor along with her art collection,” says Lydon, who was challenged with accommodating pieces by art-world heavyweights such as Donald Judd, Willem de Kooning, Wolfgang Tillmans, and Sigmar Polke, as well as emerging and unknown artists. “The project really was a collaboration in the best sense, because we talked about every detail and how everything would work together. The look of the apartment might seem a bit stark on first sight, but it’s all about balance. We wanted to let the artwork breathe and leave space for new pieces, and accent the spare interiors with the vibrancy of the art.” The picture windows are like massive expanses of wallpaper. The furnishings are just as deeply considered, providing a carefully weighted mix of functionality, comfort, and sculptural lines. In the living room, for example, two simply tailored sofas contrast with a sensuous Vladimir Kagan swivel chair and ottoman, a mid-20th-century armchair by Brazilian architect and designer Jorge Zalszupin, and a lamp by T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings and Finn Juhl. In the master bedroom, matching mahogany-upholstered Marco Zanuso armchairs from the 1950s play against a Louis XV-style four-poster and a modern black desk with a hint of history in its legs. And in the breakfast nook, an Art Deco ceiling fixture from the short-lived SS Normandie hangs above a Sarreid table from Knoll.

The artful fare is a far cry from its previous incarnation, which was heavy on 19th-century furniture and richly upholstered walls. “It was gorgeous,” Lee says, “but we never used it.” Fortunately, the formidable team of French and Lydon knew their client’s fear of minimalist abstracts. “Everyone was wonderful,” Lee recounts. “Kate is a friend now, and I socialise with my architect and still love my contractor. It was crazy, but I’m really glad we did it.”