



# Minimal Moderne

EMBOLDENED BY TWO STYLE-SAVVY CLIENTS, INTERIOR DESIGNER DAVID KLEINBERG CREATES AN APARTMENT FULL OF FRENCH '40s FLAIR

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**THE SLIM YOUNG WOMAN** ponders the right word to describe her new apartment. Spare? Simple? Clean-lined? Gutsy? She furrows her brow, searching for what the French call *le mot juste*. "Understated," she says finally, looking pretty discreet herself in a crisp white blouse over a black turtleneck and blue jeans.

What the lady of the house refers to as understated is the result of 18 months of hard labor, as architects Oscar Shamamian and Joseph Singer, of Ferguson & Shamamian, and designer David Kleinberg carved a light, airy space out of a dark, cramped prewar Manhattan apartment. The clients—she's a former fashion editor, he's a financier—wanted a home with minimal clutter and not a lot of fuss, a look that reflected their casual lifestyle. The goal was decor that was traditional in its inspiration but modern, sleek, and youthful. "We're not that serious," she says brightly. "These are not life-or-death decisions."

"Everything in the apartment was stripped to make the apartment bright and loftlike," says Singer. "The decision to change the entire infrastructure of the apartment was challenging, but the result captures a real 1940s feeling."

The couple ended up with a quietly elegant neo-classical architecture reduced to a lyrical minimum that Kleinberg filled with a veritable Who's Who of 20th-century French designers: Jacques Adnet, Jean Royère, Eugène Printz, Gilbert Poillerat, Clément Rousseau, André Arbus, Jean Prouvé, Jean-Michel Frank. Along with this cabinetmaking pedigree is a collection of 20th-century art, with works by Brice Marden, Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko, Jean Dubuffet, and Robert Mapplethorpe.



"What appealed to me was their passion," Kleinberg says of his clients, who accompanied him on two buying trips to Europe. (On one occasion, they literally bought a chair—an Adnet original that matched a desk they'd found in New York—right out from under a dealer in Paris.) "They're exacting and strong-minded, but they want your best idea, and they'll go the distance to make it happen."

The proof is on view from the moment visitors open the front door and step into an entrance hall that's as remarkable for what is not there as for what is. Instead of a console for depositing keys and mail, a tan Jean-Michel Frank banquette sits next to a

An oil painting by Mette Klavness dominates the bedroom; the swing-arm lamp is from Hinson. Facing page, from top left: Louis XV-style gilt-wood chairs blend with circa-1900 Swedish sconces and an 1880s Norwegian trestle table; a chandelier from a French bakery rests on the floor. Dag Erik Leversby's *Magnolia Cross* hangs above an 18th-century Norwegian chest of drawers. Etchings of kings are displayed above an iron table by Heiberg Cummings Design. See Resources.





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Clockwise from top left: Vases made for Napoleon I flank the entrance to the dining room. Robert Allen's Plush Mohair covers the sofa in the library; the curtains are made of Old World Weavers' Scarborough silk. A Venetian Baroque mirror hangs above a 19th-century English marble mantel in the living room. See Resources.





Diego Giacometti table topped with a flourish of black calla lilies. A similar functionality is at work in the dining room, which is devoid of breakfronts and dominated by a circular table that Kleinberg designed, 19th-century English chairs, an unobtrusive buffet, and a huge Marden painting, *Blue Horizontal*. The intent is not to wow the uninitiated but to create a familial, if slightly formal, setting for the clients and their 14-year-old daughter and ten-year-old son.

That aesthetic infuses the children's rooms as well. "They're not about cute and disposable," says the designer, pointing out that the girl's bedroom is equipped with a Marc du Plantier desk and bench, a Royère lamp, and Christofle bronze-plated vases. "It's a room she can grow into."

If it all sounds stark and serious, it isn't. Think mellow mélange. In the living room, for instance, an 18th-century Venetian mirror hanging above a 19th-century English mantel reflects two souvenirs of the 1930s and '40s: a du Plantier cocktail table and a Jean-Michel Frank side table. "So much midcentury French furniture is based on 18th-century models anyway," Kleinberg says. "It's nice to see a corresponding design and inspiration between the periods." And in the master bedroom, a Printz chest



Brice Marden's 1987 *Blue Horizontal* forms a Modernist backdrop for the dining room's mahogany table and English Regency chairs. Facing page, from top: Cabinetry by Ferguson & Shamamian Architects and Viking stainless-steel appliances in the kitchen; the vintage Jean Royère iron stools are upholstered in a Kravet embossed vinyl. Sean Scully's *Checker Blue*, 2000, and an untitled 1969 work by Cy Twombly hang in the family room; the Jacques Adnet leather chairs were found in Paris. See Resources.





of drawers holds pride of place. "It's stripped-down Louis XVI but not minimalist. It still has ormolu mounts, nice handles, and a marble top."

Both French '40s furniture and its ancien-régime antecedents share an appealing "rationality of design," he adds. "They don't need a lot of ribbons and bows. The embellishment comes from a lacquer finish or an inlaid-straw treatment. It's these very small strokes, beautifully done."

The same could be said of Kleinberg's design. His accumulation of strokes has produced a cool, serene environment for the young family, and the attendant lack of clutter makes the urban din just outside seem very far away indeed. "Believe it or not, the apartment is always like this," he says. "The point wasn't to keep a lot of things out. It's all there; it's just enclosed out of sight." The main reason for the project's success, though, say the parties involved, is the collaboration they enjoyed. "We did something creative that we're all happy with, and we still ended up good friends," says the client. Adds Singer: "Working with someone like her brings fabulous results. And this place is a breath of fresh air for Park Avenue." ■



## the decor

ISN'T ABOUT "RIBBONS AND BOWS," SAYS KLEINBERG. "IT'S ABOUT VERY SMALL STROKES—A BEAUTIFUL LACQUER FINISH, AN INLAID-STRAW TREATMENT"

Clockwise from top left: The dressing area's bronze-frame chairs by Eugène Printz are covered in Manuel Canovas's Ondine II viscose-cotton. Lucite table lamps and cotton bed linens by Pratesi in the master bedroom. A black-lacquered Printz chest and André Arbus pearwood chairs upholstered in a Larsen silk-blend fabric. See Resources.