

## 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 neoclassical 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 strongminded, 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



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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.

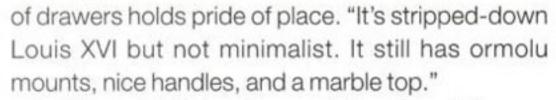
That aesthetic infuses the children's rooms as well. "They're not about cute and disposable," says the designer, pointing out that the girl's bedroom is equipped with a Marc du Plantier desk and bench, a Royère lamp, and Christofle bronze-plated vases. "It's a room she can grow into."

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









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."



