



Art: © Elizabeth Schwaiger

HOME TOUR

Inside a Gilded Age Town House With a Modern Edge

Designer Rob Johansen's restoration of the 1899 home in Manhattan's Upper East Side is a lesson in "time-hopping"

By Leonora Epstein, Photography by William Jess Laird, Styled by Alex Crowder of Field Studies Flora

July 7, 2025

These days, the word *timeless* is fraught—often misused, or employed as a blanket term to describe something elegant, when in fact it is not. But in the case of designer Rob Johansen’s recent renovation of a palatial seven-story 1899 town house on the Upper East Side, the timeless stamp is merited. “How,” Johansen asked himself at the outset of the project, “can I create a space [in an historic home] that achieves this sublime feeling of not being able to figure out what time it came from?” Time-less, you might say.

Johansen’s main source of inspiration came from an unexpected place: the final bedroom scene of Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*. “It was this idea of pairing classical design with very sharp, minimalist, futuristic pieces.” The effect of which Johansen likens to “time hopping”—the original panelling, antiques, and Deco-era pieces are juxtaposed with modernist furnishings and the Japanese principle of *shibui*, which encompasses impermanence and fluidity. (The wife, who is half Japanese, requested that the home reflect these values.)



"The clients always wanted to have a live edge table [in the house]," says Johansen. Instead of buying one to fit the bill the designer wanted a challenge, so he created a custom dining table for the kitchen that has a live edge and bowed legs. Fernando Mendes dining chairs surround the table. The horizontal wall sculpture is by John Wigmore.



In the dining room, Johansen opted for a round, Art Deco Macassar dining table, echoing themes of circularity. The Josef Frank hutch features pasted botanical drawings. "We wanted a sense of a garden feel," says Johansen. The light fixture is by Studi o Drift.



The primary bedroom projects an aura of textural serenity thanks to Ayala Serfaty's Cloud Fixture and walls covered in Loro Piana cashmere.