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**Extraordinary Homes
from Aspen to Paris**

WINTER 2025/26, ISSUE N° 43
GALERIEMAGAZINE.COM

In an apartment on New York's Upper West Side that designer Jessica Gersten renovated, walnut paneling lines the living room walls, which serve as the sumptuous backdrop for a mixed-media work by Tschabalala Self and a Bruno Moinard Éditions cabinet inset with ceramic tiles. A Studio Van den Akker sofa is grouped with tables by Atelier Benoit Viaene, stools by Atelier de Troupe, and a Giancarlo Valle lounge chair in a Holland & Sherry leather. The ceiling fixture is by Ovature Studios, the standing sculpture is by Derek Fordjour, and the rug is by Beauvais Carpets. For details see Sources.



CHARACTER DRIVEN

With an ensemble of elevated materials, distinctive furnishings, and engaging art, designer Jessica Gersten recasts a white-box Manhattan apartment with personality and panache

By KATHLEEN HACKETT
Photography by NICOLE FRANZEN
Styled by KATJA GREEFF



IT HAS BEEN ALMOST TWO DECADES SINCE JESSICA GERSTEN DOFFED HER HAT AS A FASHION-DESIGN ACOLYTE

working for some of the world’s most influential tastemakers, including Ralph Lauren and Giorgio Armani. But she credits the ten years she spent in their hallowed studios as directly informing the thriving New York City–based interior design practice she founded afterward. “I was eager to expand from fashion into a full lifestyle aesthetic,” she says. “I got one person to take a risk on me and, largely by word of mouth, one project just led to another.”

Thanks to her distinctive brand of earthy elegance, marked by neutral palettes, compelling forms, and exquisite details, Gersten attracts no shortage of cold calls these days from potential clients looking for a home filled with what she describes as “multisensory experiences.” One such inquiry came a few years ago from an art collector with two young children who had decamped from a downtown loft to a recently built condo tower on Manhattan’s Upper West Side. The interior, lacking soul and clad to the teeth in luxury signatures—acres of marble and white oak, polished-nickel fixtures, white walls everywhere—was less a home than a convenient place to live.

“He had never hired a decorator before, because he has an aunt who was an interior designer at one point in her life and he would just consult her,” says Gersten. “But he knew this was something altogether different. The apartment needed an entire transformation.”

So she set to work, recasting every inch of the 3,000-square-foot space as a haven where its owner could raise his kids and live with his impressive collection of works by artists such as Cindy Sherman, Mickalene Thomas, Derrick Adams, Amoako Boafo, and Tschabalala Self. “We converted it from a white box into a home that doesn’t look anything like a condominium,” says Gersten.

She started by dressing every vertical surface in warm-tone plaster, subtly textured or patterned wallpaper, or richly grained walnut paneling, erasing the antiseptic chill that ran through the apartment. The walnut adds a pronounced



In the dining area, Gersten paired an Arthur Casas table with chairs by fellow Brazilian Sergio Rodrigues, all acquired from Espasso, and installed an Ovature Studios pendant above; the ceramic centerpiece was commissioned from Caroline Blackburn, the large painting is by Mickalene Thomas, and the diptych in the corner is by Chuck Close. OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: An Amoako Boafo painting hangs next to the living room’s patinated-brass bar, which displays a small work by Anselm Kiefer. Crowned by a Nader Gammass ceiling light, the entry features a colorful Kehinde Wiley piece and a Boafo mosaic above a Carol Egan floating shelf.





A Cindy Sherman photograph presides over the den, where a custom velvet-upholstered sleeper sofa is complemented by a vintage Glustin Luminares lamp atop a side table by J. M. Szymanski; the larger table is by Galerie Gosserez, and the rug is by Woven. OPPOSITE: The kitchen is outfitted with plaster-finished custom cabinetry, Gaggenau appliances, and a Waterstone faucet. Gersten used Paonazzo marble for the backsplash and countertops, and upholstered the Haute Living counter stools in a Dedar fabric.



“WE CONVERTED IT FROM A WHITE BOX INTO A HOME THAT DOESN’T LOOK ANYTHING LIKE A CONDOMINIUM,” SAYS DESIGNER JESSICA GERSTEN

richness throughout the entertaining spaces, which Gersten outfitted with a refined mix of sculptural contemporary furnishings typified by the living room’s chic curved sectional sofa, biomorphic cocktail tables, and a Brutalist-inspired wall cabinet inset with artisanal ceramic tiles. In one corner of the room, she designed a minimalist bar clad in panels of moody patinated brass.

For Gersten, the project was an unusual collaboration. “Typically, I am the one pushing the client out of his or her comfort zone, doing a bit of a dance by providing options, one of which I know to be the best one. But this guy would consider my suggestions and tell me to call him back when I had a cooler idea!” she says.

The primary bath is a case in point. There was a dissonance between the floor-to-ceiling marble room and the rest of the apartment, but gutting it completely seemed unnecessary. When Gersten offered an efficient compromise—to replace the upper sections of marble with plaster—the client was underwhelmed. “That’s when I understood how much he wanted to stretch,” she says. In the end, walnut panels cut in an intricate asymmetrical puzzle pattern met his approval.



“I WANT TO BRING TOGETHER ARTISTS WHOSE WORK SPEAKS TO DIFFERENT HUMAN EXPERIENCES, BOTH JOYFUL AND DIFFICULT,” SAYS THE HOMEOWNER



FROM TOP LEFT: In one of the children's rooms, an artwork by Zohra Opoku is mounted above the Gersten-designed bed, which is upholstered in a Holland & Sherry fabric; the pendant is a 1930s Josef Hürka design for Napako, and the rug is by CB2. An Allied Maker light and a Melissa A. Cromwell ceramic mirror from Studio Van den Akker make a sculptural pairing in the powder room, which has a custom spider dolomite sink with Graff fittings.



The primary bedroom, lined in a Phillip Jeffries hemp wall covering, has a custom-designed bed that features a headboard with velvet upholstery, integrated floating nightstands, and Pierre Chareau sconces. The curtains are made with a Great Plains by Holly Hunt fabric, and the painting is by Celeste Rapone.

It makes sense, this client's pursuit of unique beauty. Having grown up in a family of collectors, he was taught that art is a way of engaging deeply with the world. Today, art is a vital presence in his daily life, part of how he examines his assumptions.

“I like to collect contemporary art that reflects the complexities, struggles, and triumphs of life today,” says the client, who insisted that Gersten design the rooms before the collection was installed. “Diversity of perspective is central to my approach, and I want to bring together artists whose work speaks to different human experiences, both joyful and difficult.”

It's an outlook he wants to impart to his children, and paintings by Zohra Opoku and Clotilde Jiménez hang above the beds in their rooms. Art, intentionally, is everywhere in this home.

“I hope to surround myself and my family with art that matters,” says the owner. “Art that challenges us, moves us, and becomes part of the story of who we are.” □