



Above & Beyond

INTERIOR DESIGN: VICENTE WOLF
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PHOTOGRAPHY: VICENTE WOLF



T rue artists welcome constraint. It plunges them into that state that psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi dubbed “flow,” where the mind, dancing in a space beyond thinking, tangoes with inspiration to create magic. For Vicente Wolf, the catalyst was his clients. “They were very much involved, which is good,” says Wolf of the owners of this New York City apartment. “They helped me to step out of my comfort zone.”

Wolf linked two apartments into one seamless—and seemingly endless—space, stripped of its decorative molding and wooden floors. “I wanted a flow that really went through the space in a very light, unbroken way,” he says. That response is underscored by glossy white walls, ceilings and floors, a Wolf trademark. “I think of what we do as couture. It is fitted to the person living there,” he says. “There are things I repeat but they’re the things, if I keep the metaphor going, like a zipper or a button that just disappear.” Included in that list are his penchant for glowing acrylic display cubes, photo ledges, the pairing of tactile trays with tufted ottomans, and classic yet simple accessories, like Hinson’s sconces and their three-armed floor lamp. “They’re strong in their design but they fade into the background,” Wolf says. “They don’t try to compete for your attention.”

Reflective stainless-steel surfaces, another Wolf signature, peekaboo wall openings and the interplay of shadow and light underline the home’s sense of discovery and movement. The profusion of French blue sofas ties the interior to the view of blue sky hovering over Central Park. Ditto the bird legs of the Meret Oppenheim table and the fluffy white sheared lambskin rug. “And then, within that, we sprinkled elements that had a sense of surprise, a little bit of humor and a sense of the unexpected,” Wolf says: the Warhol Brillo boxes pushed under a living room window or the 24-karat-gold painted Walead Beshly piece tucked behind the Vladimir Kagan sofa, from Holly Hunt, in the gallery room.





The intersection where the clients' edgy, eclectic art collection and humorous furniture pieces—like the Campana Brothers' Vermelha chair—meets Wolf's vision results in a space that reads serene rather than strident. "The intellectual part is balancing elements, balancing scale, balancing colors," he says. "Then there's instinct, where you're speaking in the voice of the client." Tranquility is orchestrated by restraint. "There's a lot of empty space," he points out. "And a sense of air around everything." Wolf suggested an 18th-century Italian Rococo table, discovered at Les Puces, the Paris flea market held at Porte de Clignancourt, to hold the television. "Within all that contemporary, they like patina," Wolf says. Working off of a hunch, he suggested swapping out its marble top with an orange acrylic design. "The center of that room needed an accent. It needed an exclamation point," he says. "And that irreverence is who they are."

Wolf's reliance on his intuition is absolute. "I never question what I do in design," he says. "Other things, but not design." When the project is complete, the impulses that drove that project vanish. "It's not according to a formula or what you learned in school," he says. "It's what your instinct tells you works well." At the heart of his work is a sense of joy and curiosity, inherent within his process of incorporating the art, where work dissolved into wonder and discovery. "We really never discussed what was going where," he notes. "Just the art came in and we started placing it: 'Oh, that looks great there; ah, look at this with the view.' And it just sort of evolved."

"You can't design a room around the art," Wolf says. "I think the art has to fit in and you have to judge the fact that you are interpreting the person who selected that art. So it doesn't have to match since it's all speaking the same language." That understanding enables a Cindy Sherman photograph, a John Chamberlain crushed car sculpture and a bright geometric abstract by Torbin Glieler to peacefully coexist in the shadowy library. "The room was so strong that the painting, despite having so much color, was calmed," Wolf explains. That delicate juxtaposition is everywhere. In the gallery room, the exuberance of Robert Gober's *X-Playpen*, a colorful assortment of Adam Pendleton silkscreens, jovial figures by Daniel Oates and a tower that displays a collection of Murano glass animals, are offset by the motherly hug of the Kagan sofa and the discipline of a giltwood hand chair sculpture by Pedro Friedeberg. "They just sort of balance each other out." Ultimately, "You can't feed the same dish to everybody," Wolf says. "You can only present to people what you hope they will accept. With these clients, it's always a lot of fun." ■ Vicente Wolf, vicentewolf.com