

Asian antiques, including a pair of six-foot-tall Chinese candlesticks and a 10th-century carved-stone panel from India, stand out against white walls, floors and furnishings in Sandra Eu's Manhattan duplex. Designer Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz reupholstered the sofas that John Saladino designed for the art deco home as part of the early-'80s renovation but did not consider replacing them. He did, however, add sheer organza drapes and delicate Roman shades to diffuse sunlight and to provide depth and simpatico detail without blocking the view.



A SOFT TOUCH

GREAT DESIGN
ENDURES,
AS BENJAMIN
NORIEGA-ORTIZ
FOUND OUT
WHEN HE WAS
HIRED TO REFRESH
A MANHATTAN
APARTMENT THAT
JOHN SALADINO
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THE EARLY '80S.



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SANDRA EU'S MANHATTAN APARTMENT IS AN AESTHETIC ADVENTURE, GLIDING SEAMLESSLY FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE 21ST CENTURY. It is both formal and comfortable, traditional yet flirting with the avant garde. It was, however, the view of the East River that sold her on the place: "When I walked in, I knew immediately that this was the apartment I wanted," says the widely traveled art and fashion enthusiast. "A view of water has always made me feel tranquil."

Widowed in 1976 (her late husband, Andrew Eu, was the managing director of Hong Kong Television Broadcasts), she bought into this venerable art deco tower in 1983, when her four children were all attending school on the East Coast, "so they would have a place to return during holidays or after graduation, if they chose to," she says. But the apartment itself needed help. Eu turned to the celebrated New York interior designer John Saladino.

"The apartment," he recalls, "had great views and wonderful light,

and I knew I could make large, flowing, serene spaces." But first what remained from the original building and subsequent renovations had to be totally gutted. In their place, Saladino created a large living room and formal dining room that are barely separated; a commodious library and an ample breakfast nook are closed off from the more public rooms by pocket doors. He created the interior architecture from scratch, adding neoclassical baseboards and crown moldings and hiding drapery tracking in the soffits and ceilings. He also chose the furniture—some fine antiques, some pieces of his own design—to complement Eu's magnificent Asian art (both ancient and modern).

Above: John Saladino installed a white tile floor and a column in the foyer, which features a 2,000-year-old Han dynasty horse; Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz added sheer drapes between the foyer and the living room and put the sculpture on an acrylic light box that adds modernity, drama and sheen to the original design. Opposite: The acrylic table Noriega-Ortiz designed for the living room is an of-the-moment complement to the antiques.

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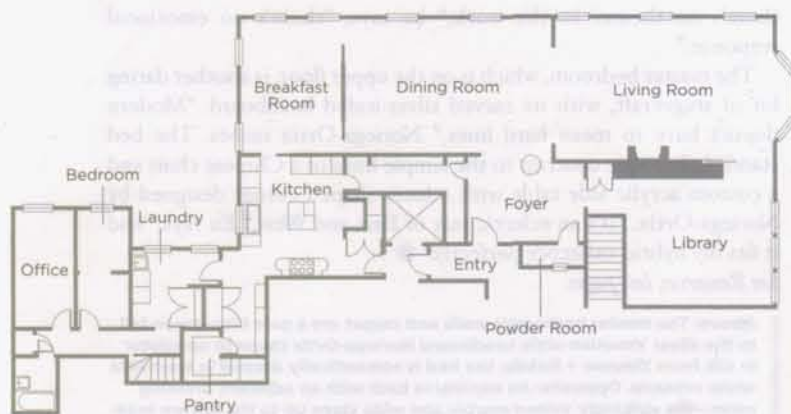
ABOUT SIX YEARS ago, Eu called Noriega-Ortiz after smoke damage from a fire upstairs made the apartment's once-elegant taupe walls seem dingy. She wanted to maximize light and freshen up the fabrics. "I knew Benjamin had worked for John and wouldn't try to make it traditional," says Eu. She loved the open layout Saladino had created. Fortunately, both designer and client come from tropical islands (Eu was born and raised in Hawaii, Noriega-Ortiz in Puerto Rico), and they share some sensibilities. "In hot climates," says Noriega-Ortiz, "openness and simplicity of form are the way to go."

But he was reluctant to make extensive changes in the design created by his mentor and former employer. "I respect the work John did here; I didn't need to impose a whole new concept." So Saladino's open floor plan and minimalist built-ins, so evocative of their time, remain, including crescent-shaped banquettes in the bay windows and the sliding pocket doors and trim moldings. "The architecture

still stands up," says Saladino, "because it's not trendy; it's understated and based on classical proportions."

As a first step, Noriega-Ortiz painted the walls "very, very white," including the foyer, which Saladino had dressed in aubergine. Noriega-Ortiz proposed silver for the floor, but Eu was afraid it would feel too cold, so the oak herringbone parquet was bleached to resemble raw wood. Sheer drapes and Roman shades layered on the apartment's wrap-around windows "calm things down visually," says Noriega-Ortiz, who believes that flowing fabric promotes serenity. Wide-ranging materials, from crystal to Lucite, velvet to stone, add interest in lieu of color.

Above: For the library, Noriega-Ortiz added leather *Dodo* chairs by Toshiyuki Kita from Cassina, as well as a Lucite coffee table and feathered lamp shades. Pale silk draperies on a ceiling-mounted track installed by Saladino disguise the wall-mounted TV and bookshelves. Opposite: In the dining room, Eu's antique mirror hangs beside a custom-made table (with a built-in lazy Susan); John Saladino's *Cala* chairs are still perfect seating.



*** Key to the Style**

- White walls and bleached oak floors
- Neoclassical architectural detailing
- Furniture: mostly modern with roots in antiquity
- Mix of antiques and contemporary pieces
- Draperies for windows and between rooms
- Theatrical manipulation of light



SO WELL RESOLVED was Saladino's original design that Noriega-Ortiz didn't even rearrange the living room furniture. "It's just exactly where it belongs," he says. He did reupholster the three existing Saladino sofas in a Gretchen Bellinger fabric, adding some texture, and replaced a single large coffee table with two dissimilar smaller ones: "Because the sofas are all the same size and fabric," he says, "having two different tables provides visual variety."

Styles and periods are mixed with abandon throughout. "Good design goes with good design," he says to summarize the mix-and-match principle. The dining room has a new, round table that looks old under an antique mirror; Saladino-designed chairs remain—although Noriega-Ortiz slipcovered them for protection. (Eu is now the grandmother of seven youngsters, ages 3 to 10, who visit frequently.)

Noriega-Ortiz took a bold curatorial approach to displaying the oversize Asian art and antiques Eu has collected in her travels. "If

there's no theater in the work," he says, "there's no emotional response."

The master bedroom, which is on the upper floor, is another daring bit of stagecraft, with its carved silver-leafed headboard. "Modern doesn't have to mean hard lines," Noriega-Ortiz insists. "The bed stands in baroque contrast to the simple lines of a Chinese chair and a custom acrylic side table with a lotus-shaped cutout designed by Noriega-Ortiz. "It's an eclectic mix of East and West," Eu says, "and it fits my hybrid existence perfectly." ❧

See Resources, last pages.

Above: The master bedroom's walls and carpet are a pale blue-green foil to the silver Venetian-style headboard Noriega-Ortiz chose to upholster in silk from Zimmer + Rohde; the bed is romantically draped in washable white organza. **Opposite:** An expansive bath with an adjacent dressing room—the strikingly veined marble and wide steps up to the tub are legacies of Saladino's renovation; the Cees Braakman wire stool is new.

