



text: jen renzi photography: bärbel miebach

## it's curtain time

Fur, feathers, and a giant lizard take center stage at a SoHo loft by Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz

Royal Shakespeare Company board member Laurence Isaacson is passionate about acting, and his hunt for a New York pied-à-terre can only be described as Method in its truest sense: full immersion. Isaacson, also a London restaurateur and chairman

of the media-genic private club Home House, and partner Mark Watty, a writer-producer, toured 22 apartments in 48 hours, winding up at a loft on the frayed edges of SoHo—just off Broadway, in appropriate thespian fashion. →



Isaacson's search for a designer was more improv in spirit. Intrigued by the building's sleek and quirky lobby, he inquired after the name of the person responsible, then simply showed up at Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz's office unannounced. Given the designer's penchant for outside theatrical statements, a casting director couldn't possibly have found a better fit for the role. "When I opened the door and saw lamps with ostrich-feather shades, I knew we'd get along," Isaacson recalls.

He and Watty now possess their very own ostrich-feather lamp shades—as well as a 15-foot-tall aluminum-leaved portal, a saucy photographic reinterpretation of

Caravaggio's *Il Bacchino*, and plenty of other scene-stealing details. "I took a clean, boxy space and added color and feathers and fur and a twisted sense of scale," summarizes Noriega-Ortiz, who collaborated with architect Brian E. Boyle on the 4,000-square-foot duplex.

Because Noriega-Ortiz and Isaacson understand the dramatic value of a grand entrance, the designer moved the front door to the dark garden level, making the ground level appear brighter by comparison. The two are connected by a new stainless-steel staircase that climbs a gold-glazed stairwell—painted to simulate a skylit glow—and slices through the garden-level den.

This faux light well, which gives a sense of openness to the windowless den, is just one of Noriega-Ortiz's bright solutions to the loft's lack of sunshine and views. Most outrageous is the come-hither photo Caravaggio, blown up to a 4-by-5-foot billboard format and positioned to juice up an undistinguished courtyard wall that faces the front door. Noriega-Ortiz styled and produced the original photo for a *New York* magazine story. "I discovered the model on the street—just like Caravaggio used to," he says proudly. "I'm obsessed with baroque art." (Why doesn't this surprise us?)

Upstairs, he mirrored an 82-foot-long sidewall and aluminum-leaved the original →



**Previous spread, left:** Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz's photographic interpretation of Caravaggio's *Il Bacchino* presides over Philippe Starck's polypropylene sofa and thermoplastic-polymer stools in the courtyard of a SoHo loft that Noriega-Ortiz designed. In the corridor, Mario Bellini's leather-covered Cab chairs face wool curtains concealing a home office. **Previous spread, inset:** For an oversize lamp in an upstairs bedroom, Noriega-Ortiz paired a silver candlestick base and a silvered-paper shade.

**Left:** Noriega-Ortiz designed the living area's wool-loop rug and sofa upholstered in linen velvet; Mattalano designed the lounge chair. The tree-trunk table base is bronze. Faux pony skin covers the ottoman. **Above:** Flanking Christian Liaigre's curved sofa are custom acrylic side tables and 1940's Venini lamps topped by knitted-wool shades; the round side tables are solid glass. **Below:** Mirrors span the upper level's 82-foot-long sidewall; flea-market silver candelabras play off the original cast-iron columns' new aluminum leafing.





cast-iron columns standing in front. "It makes an already big space seem bigger," he says. "You work with what you have." For the living area's ambience, Isaacson requested "hotel lobby," with scattered seating groups. The primary pieces of furniture—a Christian Liaigre sofa, a boxy custom version, a table with a bronze tree-trunk base—are tied together by a custom circular rug 16 feet in diameter. "Round rugs are fabulous. You can rotate them periodically to protect from wear and tear," says Noriega-Ortiz. No small consideration, given Isaac-



son's legendary parties, also the reason behind a decision to ebonize the pine floor. Sheer polyester-viscose veils the front windows, softening the sidewalk view. Installed where the fabric hits the floor, gelled box lights cast a pastel wash upward during the day. When blackout shades descend at night, the colors take on dramatic, intense tones.

Everywhere but the living area and the →

**Left:** The den features a poster of the lizard mascot of London's Home House, Laurence Isaacson's private club in a Robert Adam mansion. Furniture includes a velvet-upholstered sofa, silk-covered armchairs by Christian Liaigre, and an Eero Saarinen Tulip table with its original walnut top. Above the table, the landing of the loft's stainless-steel staircase seemingly hangs in midair; the bottom flight descends behind the wall. **Right:** The stairwell's gold glaze emulates the glow of sunshine.



kitchen, saturated shades of paint betray Noriega-Ortiz's obsession with monochrome: royal blue and slate gray for bedrooms, searing yellow and deep bronze for bathrooms, full-bodied burgundy for the den. "The colors make it quite a manly apartment," the designer says. And most of the furnishings wouldn't look out of place at a gentleman's club, although the den's armchairs are tarted up in cream-colored silk. "The decor hits you like a stage set," he explains. "It was designed for entertaining—and as entertainment." 

PROJECT TEAM (BENJAMIN NORIEGA-ORTIZ): ANDY SUVALSKY. PROJECT TEAM (BRIAN E. BOYLE, AIA): RAGIP ERDEM, CHRISTOPHER CAMA.

SOFA, STOOLS (COURTYARD): KARTELL. DRAPERY FABRIC (CORRIDOR), SOFA FABRIC (LIVING AREA): GRETCHEN BELLINGER. RUGS (CORRIDOR, DEN): ROGER OATES DESIGN THROUGH BEAUVAIS CARPETS. CHAIRS (CORRIDOR, UPSTAIRS BEDROOM): CASSINA. LAMP BASE, DESK (UPSTAIRS BEDROOM): THROUGH 145 ANTIQUES. CUSTOM LAMP SHADE: ORIENTAL LAMP SHADE COMPANY. BENCH LEATHER (UPSTAIRS BEDROOM), CLUB CHAIR LEATHER (LIVING AREA): EDELMAN LEATHER. CLUB CHAIR, OTTOMAN (LIVING AREA): GEORGE SMITH; CORTINA LEATHERS (FAUX PONY SKIN). CUSTOM SOFA, ARMCHAIRS: MANZANARES FURNITURE CORPORATION. CUSTOM SOFA FABRIC: CORAGGIO TEXTILES. DRAPERY FABRIC: TAPESTRIA. CUSTOM RUG: ARCHITECTURAL FLOORING. TABLE BASE: THROUGH FAR EASTERN ANTIQUES. GLASS SIDE TABLES: WICKER WORKS. SIDE TABLE ACRYLIC: PLEXICRAFT. LOUNGE CHAIR FABRIC: DINTIMAN DESIGN ASSOCIATES. LOUNGE CHAIR, SOFA (LIVING AREA), ARMCHAIRS (DEN): HOLLY HUNT. COCKTAIL TABLES (LIVING AREA, DEN), SOFA (DEN): PROFILES. LAMP BASES (LIVING AREA, DOWNSTAIRS BEDROOM): THROUGH CHAMELEON ANTIQUES. CUSTOM LAMP SHADES (LIVING AREA, DOWNSTAIRS BATHROOM, DOWNSTAIRS BEDROOM): AND BOB'S YOUR UNCLE. PEDESTAL TABLE (DEN): THROUGH REGENERATION. FLOOR LAMP (DEN): COSINE FLOOR LAMPS THROUGH CITY STUDIO. ARMCHAIR FABRIC: HENRY CALVIN FABRICS. FLOOR CUSHION FABRIC: CLAREMONT. METALWORK (STAIRWELL): CREATIVE METAL FABRICATORS. GLAZING: JUDITH EISLER. CUSTOM SINK (DOWNSTAIRS BATHROOM): CUSTOM CEMENT STUDIO; DORNBRACHT THROUGH AF SUPPLY (FITTINGS). SINK (UPSTAIRS BATHROOM): KOHLER. SHOWER CURTAIN LATEX: CANAL RUBBER COMPANY. CLUB CHAIR (DOWNSTAIRS BEDROOM): THROUGH UPSTAIRS DOWNSTAIRS ANTIQUES; HOLLAND & SHERRY (FABRIC). BEDCOVER FABRIC: SAVEL. DRAPERY FABRIC: RAE TRADING. UPHOLSTERING, CUSTOM DRAPERY: K. FLAM ASSOCIATES. PAINT: BENJAMIN MOORE & CO. LIGHTING CONSULTANT: THOMPSON + SEARS. GENERAL CONTRACTOR: BFI CONSTRUCTION.

- BEDROOMS 1
- BATHROOMS 2
- KITCHEN 3
- LIVING AREA 4



*Left, from top: The downstairs bathroom's custom cut-glass chandelier and tinted cast-cement sink. A stainless-steel vanity, custom blown-glass light fixture, and latex shower curtain in an upstairs bathroom. Leather floor tiles on a wall of an up-*

*stairs bedroom. Right: In the downstairs bedroom, antique Venetian white-glass lamps and their custom ostrich-feather shades contrast with the mo-hair of the bedcover. The room's walls are draped in polyester-viscose.*

