



CHELSEA

BLANC DE BLANC

DEFYING MANHATTAN'S NOTORIOUS GRIME,
INTERIOR DESIGNER BENJAMIN NORIEGA-ORTIZ DECKS OUT HIS DUPLEX
IN EVERY IMAGINABLE SHADE OF WHITE

LEFT: Interior designer Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz. THIS PAGE: A string of Oriental pearls inspired the seven-layer custom-paint wall finish in the cloud-borne living room; in the evenings, a 1930s chrome-and-milk-glass floor lamp by Gilbert Rohde casts a soft glow. A fluffy Mongolian lamb throw envelops a reproduction 1950s white Ultraleather chaise from Area I.D.; behind it, Noriega-Ortiz's clear acrylic Float settee for BNO Design has removable canvas cushions. The 1930s-style Steve sofa from BNO Design is also upholstered in Ultraleather with canvas cushions; above it hangs an Antoine Bootz photograph. The Philippe Starck acrylic and chrome chair is a prototype, bought at auction.



THE FIRST THING Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz and Steven Wine do when they return to their Chelsea apartment each evening is throw their street clothes into the washing machine: Manhattan is notoriously grimy, and their eighth-floor duplex is an immaculate composition in shades of white. The chalky palette ranges from the blinding snow of Greek marble to the rich cream of wool rugs—but it would take an Eskimo's vocabulary to name the full spectrum of non-color represented in the 1,200-square-foot apartment.

There are equally subtle variations in surface treatment, too. "When you use white exclusively, different textures become extremely important," says Noriega-Ortiz, a Puerto Rican-born interior designer who counts rock star Lenny Kravitz among his clients. The walls glow with a soft matte sheen inspired by a string of pearls that a friend of the designer's brought back from China. It took seven layers of paint mixed with marble dust and mica to achieve the lambent effect. To create a harder-edged shine, glass particles were added to the lacquer used on some of the cabinetry.

Noriega-Ortiz also admits metallic finishes into his color scheme: Silver leaf and mirrors cover the foyer and stairwell walls, and a pair of 1930s kidney-shape cast-aluminum coffee tables by Frederick Kiesler sit in the living room like jewels cushioned in cotton wool. An adjacent glass-top table has a 1970s shiny chrome base that Wine, a lighting designer, found in the street. "A white background is a stage where every object is cast in light," says Noriega-Ortiz. "Flowers stand out, and lamps become sculptures."

Noriega-Ortiz created this blank *mise-en-scène* by gutting the nondescript 1970s apartment he bought in 2004. The entry and bedrooms are downstairs; loftlike living and kitchen-dining areas, which open onto a terrace, are on the floor above. The designer uses reflecting surfaces and transparency to create an illusion of space on the upper level. A sheer curtain can be pulled around the dining table to veil it in a diaphanous cloud; clear acrylic chairs by Philippe Starck add to the feeling of openness. "When you see through things this way, you get a sense of lightness and complexity," he says.

The designer fights any impression of high-rise boxiness by filling the rooms with curvy, sensuous furniture. A 1930s-inspired sofa, upholstered in white Ultraleather with canvas-covered cushions, is a sexy companion to a pair of 1940s Queen Anne-style chairs painted white and outfitted with fluffy Mongolian lamb seats. But Noriega-Ortiz always finds a place for well-designed technology, such as silver flat-screen TVs and Apple laptop computers. And Wine's father, an astronomer, gave the couple a very professional-looking telescope for stargazing. Unfortunately, the impressive instrument comes only in black. **SEE RESOURCES**

Photographs by BÄRBEL MIEBACH • Text by CLAUDIA E. STEINBERG • Styled by JUTA WINKLER

BELOW: The den doubles as a guest room with custom sleep-sofas by K. Flam Associates. Noriega-Ortiz calls the 1970s cocktail table "very Dali"; it is made of fabric that has been dipped in plaster, then lacquered. The 1960s molded-plastic chairs by Danish designer Steen Ostergaard were found on eBay. The ethereal window desktop is a cantilevered half-moon of Lucite. The shag carpet used throughout the apartment is actually nylon from the Chic to Chic range by Tuflex. OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP RIGHT: The stairwell walls are mirrored or finished in hand-applied silver leaf; Noriega-Ortiz designed the curved steel banisters. A sheer curtain can be drawn around the BNO Design oval Baluster dining table, which has a Ultraleather-covered top and a clear acrylic base; Noriega-Ortiz painted the 1940s Queen Anne-style mahogany chairs a chalky white; the custom white-lacquered kitchen cabinets were made by Alpha Craft, as was all of the millwork in the apartment.





OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP: Wine designed the witty light fixtures bristling with price tags in the master bathroom; the custom cantilevered vanity is made of Surell, a moldable synthetic resin. Noriega-Ortiz discovered the twin dressers online and gave them a faux-marble finish; the pair of vintage mirrors, which he found in Seville, have ivory-colored ceramic frames. THIS PAGE: In the master suite, the feathered bedside lamps, which are suspended so they appear to float, were designed by Steven Wine and hand fabricated in his studio, And Bob's Your Uncle. Upholstered in white Ultraleather, the custom headboard extends the full width of the bedroom; the oval Gio Ponti mirror is a street-sale trophy. A machine-embroidered polyester fabric by Coraggio makes for a featherweight bedspread.