



quick**CHANGE**artistry

PARK AVENUE RENTERS WANTED TO UPGRADE THEIR APARTMENT'S STYLE WITHOUT DEMOLITION. THANKS TO SAVVY DESIGNERS, THEY GOT THE LOOK THEY WANTED IN JUST FOUR MONTHS.

**G**ood thing Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz has a sense of adventure. When Gary Silberberg and Veronica Ho asked the designer to decorate their Park Avenue apartment, they presented him with a list of restrictions that would have made a more timid spirit turn tail. Because Silberberg and Ho rent the 3,500-square-foot co-op, they couldn't knock down walls or take out unfortunate built-ins. Their landlords wouldn't let them remove any wallpaper—not even the cream-on-cream textured pattern in the hallway that resembles painted cinder blocks or, in the family room, toile in a color Noriega-Ortiz describes as “raspberries gone bad.” Because Silberberg and Ho have no guarantee that they can stay longer than their current lease allows, they preferred that major purchases be transportable, and they insisted that the project be completed quickly, lest they finish decorating just in time to move.

And, oh, just to make things interesting, Silberberg and Ho, private investors with lots of friends and a large extended family, wanted a space elegant enough to entertain in, but kid-friendly enough to feel like home to their now 3-year-old son and the baby sister who arrived shortly after the project was completed.

Noriega-Ortiz and his associate, Paul Latham, inspired by their clients' willingness to take risks, chose vibrant colors and mixed modern elements with fine antiques. They added outrageous lamps and unusual art glass and helped their clients choose paintings with a definite edge. Keeping their trademark visual wit about them, they turned a chock-full-of-challenges apartment into a nothing-less-than-magical space.

The neutral-colored seating area smoothes the transition from the cool palette of the living room to the warmer dining room (extreme right in photo). A 19th-century table pairs perfectly with classic but modern seating.

PRODUCED BY LINDA O'KEEFFE. PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANTOINE BOOTZ.  
WRITTEN BY SUSAN KLEINMAN.





Gallons of French-blue paint, a "magic wand" and a peacock-frosted lamp (above left) set the tongue-in-chic tone. Noriega-Ortiz and Latham neutralized the fireplace (above), freeing them from the tradition of clustering furniture around it. A ceramic stool and a baby grand piano—one of the owners' more felicitous leave-behinds—add sculptural elements to a living room where the central table seems to be wearing a silk tafetta ball gown. An artful sense of sparseness keeps things from becoming overly pretty or sweet.





The magic—an *Alice-in-Wonderland*-goes-uptown feeling that continues throughout the apartment—begins in the foyer, where Noriega-Ortiz and Latham drenched the ceiling in a custom-mixed French-blue paint and lavished several coats of the same color on a Queen Anne chair and a Chinese console table. Behind the furniture, a simple painted folding screen greets visitors with a dose of color so rich it's almost decadent (it also masks the wallpaper and an awkward built-in cabinet).

As playful as it is, the apartment also works. "Benjamin trained as an architect," explains Paul Latham, "so he thinks of space in a very urban-planning kind of way. Just as a piazza has lots of different axes, an apartment has got to have a careful sense of flow and function."

Two distinct seating areas in diagonal corners of the living room keep the traffic moving, and upholstery in forgiving fabrics—dark cotton velvet on the sofa and a polyester blend on several chairs—ensures that, as Silberberg says, "the kids can really run all over the place." To help keep things offspring-appropriate (and easy on the eye), accessories have been kept to a minimum; instead of knickknacks, it's knockout color that gives the apartment its personality.

Though the living room walls are painted a subtle cream, the space has still got plenty of shimmer. A lapis-colored sofa and a large table skirted in blue silk taffeta strike a refreshingly cool, almost liquid tone. Silvered

lamps and a collection of mercury-glass butler balls add just the right amount of sparkle, and the orbs reflect the room like fun-house mirrors in the down-the-rabbit-hole spirit of the entryway.

The dining room has plenty of its own glow, thanks to deep ocher walls, rich red upholstery and an enormous custom light fixture covered in spangled micro-pleated golden silk. "The dining room is really the only ceremonial room left in homes today," says Noriega-Ortiz. "As casual as life is, we still gather around the table on special occasions. I wanted this dining room to honor that." Gold taffeta shades add an elegant softness to the windows, and on the opposite wall, floor-to-ceiling draperies camouflage multiple light switches and unused built-in shelves.



With that much fabric and rich color, it would have been easy for the dining room to become fussy or overdone, a danger the designers avoided by keeping the oak floors bare, as they did in the living room. Having one long expanse of wood

flooring, explains Latham, also helps unify the "hot" and "cool" areas of the entertaining space. "The entry hall, living room and dining room all work as individual pieces of sculpture," he says, "but they work off each other, too."

Noriega-Ortiz designed oversize dining chairs covered in rich red-and-gold silk; for a playful sense of disproportion, they alternate around the dining table with much smaller Regency-style chairs. Cabinets in each corner and geometric art accentuate the room's unusual square shape.





**W**ith the public areas completed, the designers struggled to perfect the toile family room.

"The big challenge," says Noriega-Ortiz, "was how to make this wallpaper *not* be the main design element."

"To make it tougher," Latham adds, "Gary and Veronica hate any kind of muddy colors, so we were limited in choice." In the end, the designers decided to surrender to the color rather than fight it. They hung large panels of quilted mauve fabric over the two long walls, "so when you walk in, or when you're sitting on the couch," says Noriega-Ortiz, "you can barely see the wallpaper." For textural interest, they added a chenille throw on the finely ribbed, upholstered guest bed, large crumpled-paper Ingo Maurer lamps and a braided rug; and for warmth, a large array of cherished family photographs. Low-slung Donghia chairs and Asian-inspired ceramic stools offer plenty of contrasting shapes, heights and textures; and a display of the contemporary black-and-white photographs Silberberg and Ho collect is so striking that the wallpaper almost does recede from view.

"If anything," says Noriega-Ortiz, "the contrast with the fussy old-fashioned wallpaper makes the modern photographs pop out even more."

Of course, even the most pop- and pow-hungry eye needs an occasional respite, and the designers provided it in the master bedroom. The walls, coverlet and chaise in Ho's favorite color, peachy cream, help create a restful haven, and the furniture's extra curves and softness balance the austere feeling of the long, cinder block-papered hallway the couple must trek through on their way to bed. **mh**

*See Resources, last pages.*

In the family room, matching lamps in diagonal corners and an angular sofa create strong modern lines. The cocktail table is one of the few carryovers from Gary and Veronica's previous apartment. The bedroom also has a sense of play (there are koi swimming across the coverlet).

