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LIVING THE LUSH LIFE

A WELL-PADDED BACHELOR'S LIGHT AND EASY LUXE ABODE.

Facing recamier sofas, silk gauze "slipcovers" and antique and Moroccan furnishings suggest quiet leisure and intimate conversation. The knobbed chair in the foreground is a classic 19th-century Hunzinger chair.

If the phrase "bachelor pad" suggests images of secondhand furniture arranged around a giant video screen, then the 2,400-square-foot jewel box that Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz created for his client, 30-year-old entrepreneur Steven Weber, should seem surprisingly civilized. A study in restrained and graceful gestures, the apartment was conceived as a series of stage sets, each spilling into the next. The whole, says Weber, was contrived to realize his vision of the richly colored fantasy world of a child. Located in a 1907 neoclassical building overlooking Central Park, the apartment provided a perfect canvas. It was not quite blank, thanks to architectural detail, but it did not assert itself too boldly, either. While the interiors may have been inspired by an earlier era, the result is no hothouse of Victoriana, but a brilliantly orchestrated chamber piece that finds its harmonies in the balance of historical nuance and freshness of vision. This home is pure Belle Epoque—for a new century.

Produced by Linda O'Keeffe. Photographs by Michael Luppino. Written by Shax Riegler.



Recalling an Empire-period painting, the guest room mixes aristocratic velvet, gossamer silk (over a rarefied Biedermeier chair) with democratic pine and a recent Nan Goldin photo. Noriega-Ortiz's innovative use of fabric includes lining the entry hall walls and hanging translucent sheers on the inside of opaque roman shades.



"I think my architectural background is evident in my interiors," says the Puerto Rican-born designer and architect. "I like to see the way things are made, how the draperies go up and down, how the slipcovers are sewn. I like the structure of things."

Although they did little to alter the flat's original structure, Weber and Noriega-Ortiz applied a perfectionist standard in creating its envelope. It took months just to achieve the intense shades of red, blue and green that Weber wanted for the walls. Layers of tinted glazes were applied to plaster, then hand-buffed to achieve a mottled patina.

Each room is a variation on the theme of a single highly saturated color; each monochromatic environment remarkable for the visual variety the designer achieved in his jux-

taposition of textures, fabrics and the sensual yet intelligent mix of furnishings.

In contrast, Noriega-Ortiz insisted that the living room should be white. "I knew there needed to be one break from all that color," he says. Conceived as a kind of palate-cleansing sorbet between the pleasures of the other rooms, the salon's white-on-white is calmly compelling, its facing recamiers and antique and reproduction chairs inviting conversation.

The designer, who is known for his magical innovations with fabrics, lined the entry hall with romantic floor-to-ceiling draperies of creamy silk that spill directly into the columned living room, hiding the doors to the kitchen and exercise room. More important, they create a sense of occasion and impending serenity for anyone coming to visit.





The red "media lounge" is easily visible from the living room. Weber's interest in Morocco inspired the hanging lanterns. The master bedroom (near left) is a study in green; Noriega-Ortiz designed the eggplant silk slipcovered dining chair (far left) as a bridge from the living and dining areas to the media room.

Easily visible from the intersecting axes of the L-shaped apartment, the opera red "media lounge," as Weber calls it, is the dwelling's geographical and emotional heart. "It is meant to feel really luxurious and decadent," says Noriega-Ortiz.

The most sybaritic of all the rooms, it is also the one most closely related to Hollywood bachelor pad fantasies. On command, the room converts into a mogul's screening room. As a huge movie screen lowers from the ceiling, windows on two walls are blacked out by automatic shades. In the darkness, the THX stereo system does its sound check with a whoosh from the speakers. "The room trembles," Noriega-Ortiz jokes.

In fact, the entire apartment is a marvel of high-tech wiring. Lights, televisions, the sound

system—even window shades—can be controlled by the touch of one of two control screens. The first is in the media room. The second (in the master bedroom) controls, among other things, the swagged Austrian shade that stretches the length of an entire wall.

But it's more than technology that makes this place modern. It's the precision of the choices, the editorial sensibility at work in the selection of furnishings, the sophisticated mix of the Victorian, the North African, the antique and the invented. There is wisdom in the design eye that can play the pre-millennial decadence of a Nan Goldin photograph against the neoclassical decadence of a postrevolutionary French sofa. It captures the imagination in a brand new way.

See Resources, last pages.

