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SKY-HIGH STYLE

DESIGNER VICENTE WOLF STRIPS A YOUNG FAMILY'S PREWAR APARTMENT TO ITS LIGHT-FILLED ESSENCE AND THEN DRESSES IT IN RICH EARTH TONES AND ROUND-THE-WORLD TREASURES

TEXT BY DAN SHAW · PHOTOGRAPHY BY PIETER ESTERSOHN





An Upper East Side apartment designed by Vicente Wolf with associate David Rogal. In the living area, a pair of Bridgewater-style armchairs, a sectional sofa, and a club chair upholstered in Edelman Leather's Napoli cowhide, all designed by Wolf; the ebonized-wood cocktail table is from Tucker Robbins, the Steinway piano was purchased at an auction of furnishings from the Plaza hotel, and the cowhide rug is by Wolf. See Resources

In the living area, a Donald Moffett photograph above a slate-and-steel fireplace surround by Wolf, and an 18th-century Burmese lacquered table; firewood is stored in a wall pocket. Facing page, clockwise from top: The lacquered-elm bookcase is 19th-century Chinese, the hand-painted trunk is from Tibet, and the Zeiss binoculars are from the 1940s. In the foyer, a late-19th-century French stone-top console and a collection of Ethiopian carved-wood statues from VW Home; the rug is from ABC Carpet & Home. The library walls are painted in a strié pattern; the Wolf-designed sofa and ottoman are upholstered in a Pollack chenille and Edelman Leather's Sueded Buffalo Bull, respectively; and the Arne Jacobsen Swan chair is in Static wool by Great Plains. See Resources.



ENTRANCE HALLS can be a letdown. Opening the front door of almost any prewar apartment, no matter how imposing the architecture, frequently reveals a windowless gallery that offers little more than a hermetic promenade. But when a duplex in a venerable Manhattan building winds up in the hands of interior designer Vicente Wolf, it's time to watch darkness turn to light.

The entrance hall of the apartment, which Wolf revamped with design associate David Rogal for a young couple with two children, is now luminous. Walls were ripped out to establish a serene sweep of space that carries the eye to the living area beyond, where eastern sunlight slowly spreads across the ink-dark floors. Cool northern light filters through open bookshelves that separate the entrance hall from the library. And in the adjoining dining area, a gargantuan mirror—13 feet long, 9 feet tall, boldly framed in black—leans against one wall, reflecting a dramatic landscape that takes in the East River, the docks and factory buildings of the Bronx and Queens, and the distant horizon. With all the vantage points, visitors find it difficult to know where to look first.

"In the most successful spaces, you don't see everything at once," says Wolf. "The more time you spend in them, the more you discover. They open up like flowers."

By that measure, the living and dining areas are in full bloom. They are united not only by their neutral palette and sensual textures, but also by their





multicultural furnishings: a 19th-century Chinese bookcase, an 18th-century lacquered table from Burma, 1940s chairs by the Paris firm Dominique, a French chair and ottoman from the 1700s. "It's a global point of view without being thematic," says Wolf, who upholstered everything in earth-toned linen, suede, and leather. Squares of cowhide were sewn together into a vast rug for the living room, where it stretches across the floor like acres of desert sand. "You don't often see a cocktail table from Cameroon on the Upper East Side," Wolf says. "It's thumbing your nose at convention."

Frankly, the clients were not interested in being society swells, despite buying an apartment whose paneled formal dining room broadcast assumptions about the type of life they ought to be living. "If anything, they are antiestablishment," says Wolf, who banished the woodwork with nary a protest. "The problem was how to create a relaxed family home within this formal environment. Making it a loft was the best way to take advantage of the views and natural light." That proposal was met with some skepticism. "When Vicente started talking about how light will reflect off walls and ceilings, it sounded like bull to me," says the husband, an investor. "But the net effect is bright and open, and I continually notice the little ways he made that happen."

Even as he created clean backgrounds by eliminating walls and distracting details, Wolf was careful to





In the dining area, a wood-and-steel table by Wolf is surrounded by 1940s Dominique armchairs and Ruhlmann side chairs; the oversized wood-frame mirror and double-arm sconces also are by Wolf, and the 19th-century carved-wood hands are from Thailand. Facing page, clockwise from top: Wolf's paper-and-chrome ceiling fixture is hung above a granite counter-top and LEM Piston stools from Design Within Reach. The powder-room walls are paneled in mirror and bronze, the sink is a retrofitted Indian marble fountain from VW Home, and the counter is granite. In the kitchen, a Wolf range with a custom-made stainless-steel hood and backsplash, and a Turkish rug. See Resources.



Bega recessed wall lighting from MSK Illuminations and a Metro tub by Get Real Surfaces with Vola fittings in the master bath. Facing page, from top: In the master bedroom, the flat-panel headboard upholstered in Glant's Rayon Rib and tufted bench were designed by Wolf, and the carpet is by Stark. Dornbracht's Tara faucets and an Acquainta pendant lamp from Ameico in the master bath. See Resources.