

The renovation of a mid-century Greenwich Village apartment gives it the interior it was always meant to have

# Living the Dream

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Photography by MARK ROSKAMS

The renovation of this Greenwich Village apartment called for devising bookshelves inspired by those in the Finn Juhl's house in Denmark. At the left is an armchair by Hans J. Wegner; the marble-topped coffee table is by the Monteverdi-Young Furniture Company of Los Angeles. The sofa is a custom design by Bachman Brown Clem. Above it hangs a still life by Jacques Daufin, c. 1955.



to be carefully scaled or it would be too big,” one of them says. “My old historicist furniture just wouldn’t work here. For my partner modern furniture was part of his upbringing—his father went to Finland as a Fulbright fellow in 1962 to study with the glass designer Kaj Franck and he later designed for Russel Wright. But for me it took some getting used to. My first stop was on eBay, because I was in a hurry, and I bought some teak furniture, almost all of which is gone now. But I also began to learn about the designers.”

By the time they reached the conclusion that restoring the pink bathroom was not the way to go, they had acquired several fine examples of mid-century design, including a sofa and a chair by Hans Wegner, a cabinet attributed to Niels Otto Møller, and a rocker thought to be by Ole Wanscher. They contacted Peter Sweeny, an architect with whom

they had worked before, and presented him with their vision for the apartment: “Since it is in Greenwich Village, we wanted it to seem like a place an NYU professor circa 1960 might have lived. Room for lots of books. A place for reading books and listening to music. We imagined ourselves spending hours there listening to Italian opera and astringent twentieth-century chamber music on the hi-fi.” Sweeny devised a number of modifications that better balanced the space, and he also suggested bringing in Texas-born interior designer Bachman Brown Clem, thinking that Clem’s affinity for mid-century design meshed perfectly with the clients’ vision.

He was right. “I love working with clients who bring their own collections and ideas to a project,” Clem says. And the feeling goes both ways. “I knew Bachman was the right person when I looked at his website and saw, in an album of places that inspired him, the interior of a medieval Italian church. . . . I wanted someone who

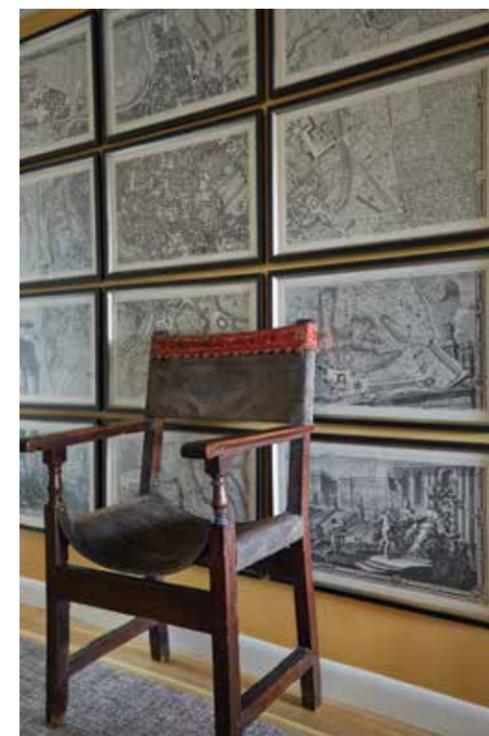


‘got’ mid-century but who could handle the fact that I like old things—including and especially Italian architecture from the Middle Ages,” one of the owners says.

Among the first requirements were the bookshelves. “There is a famous study in Finn Juhl’s house that we came across doing Internet searches for mid-century bookshelves,” one of the owners recalls. “We thought the shelves were perfect—light but with a great deal of capacity. None of us had visited the actual house, but we used the zoom feature on our iPads and looked at lots of photographs, trying to figure out exactly what Juhl had done. We came pretty close, I think, though we elected for symmetry instead of asymmetry—and we decided that the baseboard underneath probably did not need to be orange.”

A sixteenth-century Italian armchair stands in front of a reproduction of the twelve-panel iconographic map of Rome by Giambattista Nolli (1748).

An arrangement of prints and albumen photographs reflecting the owners’ travels hangs above a Wegner sofa in the office. In front of the sofa is a Bitossi side table, 1950s. The lamp on the cabinet under the window, by Maurice Bailey for Monteverdi-Young, is also attributed to Bitossi.



## “DO YOU STILL HAVE THE PINK BATHROOM?”

That’s a question residents of an early 1960s apartment building in New York’s Greenwich Village still ask each other, amused, if not bemused, by that remnant of the mid-century palette that remains in some of the units today, despite who knows how many other renovations. In 2013 the owners of the apartment shown here, believers in the integrity of period design, were looking to replace broken tiles in their bathroom, when they realized that a redo of the entire apartment would better honor the building’s original period. The ensuing project is a story of perfectly aligned sensibilities between clients, architect, and designer in creating an interior that not only honors that period but is thoughtfully, and elegantly, entirely the owners’ own.

With strong interests in art and architecture—one is a lawyer who represents museums, the other, a nonprofit arts executive—the owners bought the co-op in 2006 and just moved in. But they quickly came to understand that a mid-century apartment called for furniture of certain proportions—“it had



The 1960s Brazilian rosewood hanging bar cabinet is unattributed. To add a pop of color when it is open—and to ensure durability—Clem had the interior lined with lacquer-red laminate. Below are Thebes stools by Edward Wormley for Dunbar. Above hangs the ceramic mirror, c. 1966, by the father of one of the owners. The blue vases on the cabinet are by Bitossi.

Like much of the furniture, the rosewood dining table and chairs were both found online: the table, by Ib Kofod-Larsen, c. 1950s, in Denmark; the chairs by Johannes Andersen, 1950s, in Arizona. The pendant light is attributed to Paavo Tynell.

To hide an irregularity in the wall at one end of the shelving, Clem designed a drop-down cabinet in white oak—“that idea was taken from Juhl’s house too,” he says.



A rosewood cabinet attributed to Niels Otto Møller set a high bar in the search for furniture to complete the interior. At the left hangs a nineteenth-century Gothic revival sconce in cast iron. The rocking chair partially visible at the left is attributed to Ole Wanscher.

The rosewood bedside table, one of a pair, is by Edmond J. Spence, 1959; the sconce, also one of a pair is by Maison Arlus, 1950.

The Møller cabinet in the bedroom was the spark point for the furniture search, its beautiful rosewood, craftsmanship, and sleek lines, setting a high bar for aesthetic refinement. “My searches range from scouring the fields of the Brimfield antiques fair at five in the morning, to auction houses, to filtering through eBay or 1stdibs or other sites at all hours of the day or night,” Clem says. “I’m an addict. But I only want the really good specimens. There are a lot of cheap reproduction pieces you have to filter through.” One of his favorite finds was the rosewood hanging bar cabinet in the living room. “It’s not attributed to anyone, but the crafts-



manship and the wood veining are absolutely exquisite.” Beneath it he placed a pair of Thebes ottomans by Edward Wormley for Dunbar. Other exceptional mid-century pieces they eventually found include a circa 1960 coffee table by the Monteverdi-Young Furniture Company in L.A., an Eames Aluminum Group Executive chair from Herman Miller, the rosewood dining table by Ib Kofod-Larsen, and the dining chairs by Johannes Andersen.

Despite the modern theme of the décor there are a number of objects carried over from prior apartments that reflect the owners’ interests in history and art history—an Italian Renaissance chair, carved wooden panels believed to be from Goa, a Gothic revival sconce in the bedroom, and numerous framed vintage maps, photographs, and prints, most reflecting their extensive travels. To tie it all together Clem and his colleagues at Bachman Brown Design worked out an updated mid-century palette of rusts, golds, and dusty blues with unexpected bursts of color, such as the turquoise Bitossi ceramics, the lacquer-red interior of the hanging



bar cabinet—or the orange that went into the kitchen. “We needed a surprise in the palette,” Clem says. A 1960s orange ceramic mirror by the partner’s designing father provided just the right inspirational jolt for the kitchen.

One would never mistake this interior as actually one of the 1960s. Instead it is a “mid-century space in which history is always at the center,” says the owner. “The Bitossi pottery—something that Bachman introduced us to—has echoes of Byzantium. The book-matched rosewood veneers evoke Biedermeier and other neoclassical furniture. The marble coffee table suggests Rome as seen from the Hollywood Hills. For the kitchen counters, there was no choice but terrazzo—one of the quintessential Roman materials.” The bathroom, too, now conjures the Roman theme. Gone are the pink tiles, replaced by blue glass mosaic tiles evocative of ancient baths—though inspired here by the tiles in Eero Saarinen’s kitchen of the Miller House in Indiana. ■

In the bathroom, the color of the blue glass mosaic tiles was inspired by tiles in Eero Saarinen’s house for J. Irwin Miller in Indiana.

Clem brought in a jolt of color in the kitchen cabinetry. He had been inspired by the mirror hanging above the Brazilian rosewood hanging bar.

Found online from a source in Belgium, this unusual rosewood bookcase with cabinet is Italian, 1960s.