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# COMING HOME

A NOMADIC TOUR ABROAD INSPIRES A NEW YORK FAMILY'S HUNT FOR A PERMANENT RESIDENCE ON THEIR FINAL RETURN TO MANHATTAN.

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After a dozen years in Europe—most of them in London—a finance professional and his family were headed home to New York for good, and they were in search of an apartment that had the expansiveness of a house with the convenience of a doorman—not an easy task. But after combing more than three dozen properties, they finally found it: a Rosario Candela-designed prewar duplex with gracious scale and loads of potential.

"The space was very much reminiscent of an English home. It had the classic English-Georgian proportions," says designer Rachel Laxer. Indeed, the apartment's wide first-floor gallery that spans an enfilade of formal spaces, with window exposures on three sides of the building, could be taken straight from London's Regent's Park, she notes.

"This is a really rare find," adds architect Mary Burnham, who assisted the owners in their search. "You just don't see these apartments very often with this incredible scale."

Laxer and Burnham reinterpreted much of the apartment's original detailing as they transformed it into an elegant showcase for contemporary artwork and furnishings. "We hid all the modern devices, like wiring, to allow the spaces breath," Burnham says. "Every room was completely gutted and put back together." On the first floor, the architect designed elevated door heights to match the scale of the public spaces, replaced the old dining room with a family room and informal meal area, eliminated a dreary kitchen in favor of a streamlined Bulthaup design, and brought a distinguished paneled library back to its former glory.



**Opposite:** Architect Mary Burnham replicated the home's original architectural detailing with rope molding in the entryway, which leads from the apartment's vestibule to the wide gallery that connects the first-floor rooms. The painterly rug is by Kate Blee for Christopher Farr, and a console by Hervé Van der Straeten displays vases by Robert Kuo.

**Below:** Designer Rachel Laxer's chance find of British artist Ian Davenport's huge acrylic painting happened to work perfectly within the gallery's dimensions; the Nest ceiling lights are by Saïomé de Fontainieu from Galerie Diane de Poignac in Paris.





A settee by Italian midcentury designer Paolo Buffa is central to the living-and-dining area. Robert Motherwell's *Lyric Suite* series frames a window, which is dressed in custom drapery by de Le Cuona. The coffee table is by Sebastian Scherer, and the lamps are Robsjohn-Gibbings.

"I DON'T BELIEVE IT'S ALL ABOUT THE PAINTINGS ON THE WALL. I BELIEVE ART IS ALL AROUND YOU."

-RACHEL LAXER



The apartment's 1980s-era kitchen was gutted in favor of an airy modern layout with Bulthaup cabinetry complemented by a Ted Abramczyk pendant light from Ralph Pucci. The barstools are by Lawson-Fenning, the quartzite countertops are Walker Zanger, and the Roman-shade fabric is Holland & Sherry.



Carefully considering the homeowners' passion for art, Laxer married the architectural craftsmanship of Candela's time with the classic designs of Italian modernists such as Gio Ponti and the edgier work of present-day artisans. "These people could be creating sculpture, but they're making furniture," she says, referring to the home's bespoke furnishings and lighting as "functional art," adding, "I don't believe it's all about the paintings on the wall. I believe art is all around you." The designer had free rein to fill the canvas, because the few pieces of furniture her clients brought back with them were mostly destroyed in storage during Superstorm Sandy. "In some respects, it was very freeing," the wife says. "I wasn't tied down to anything. Everything is brand-new and meant for that apartment."

To help with the art, the owners brought on consultant Candace Worth of Worth Art Advisory, who collaborated with them to choose artwork and sculpture, while Laxer worked with them on everything else, starting with a pair

of Ponti club chairs she and the wife found at auction. "I have a very unhealthy obsession with midcentury Italian furniture and art," the wife says. Laxer sees those chairs as "a driving force of the story," which starts in the gallery that connects all the first-floor spaces. "You walk in the door, and the message is there," she explains—everything is as finely crafted as Ponti's design, such as the sinuous iron chairs upholstered with cowhide and leather by French designer Mattia Bonetti. "You have to be fearless," says Laxer. To this end, she chose big statement pieces—sculptural Nest lights by Salomé de Fontainieu and a contemporary rug by artist Kate Blee—to create interest above and interest below.

Laxer took that same approach into the husband's office, which builder Josh Wiener meticulously restored. Its clubby paneling and trim get a jolt from the wild, faceted colors of a bar cabinet by Boca do Lobo. "I never in a million years would say, 'Oh, that will look beautiful in a paneled office.' But it does!" the wife says. Wiener's team, meanwhile,

Richard Misrach's *Untitled* photograph accents a wall in the dining area, which features a walnut-and-bronze table by Hudson Furniture. The chandelier, made with glass lenses, is by British artist Mark Brazier-Jones; the host chairs are by Promemoria, and the side chairs are by Christian Liaigre.

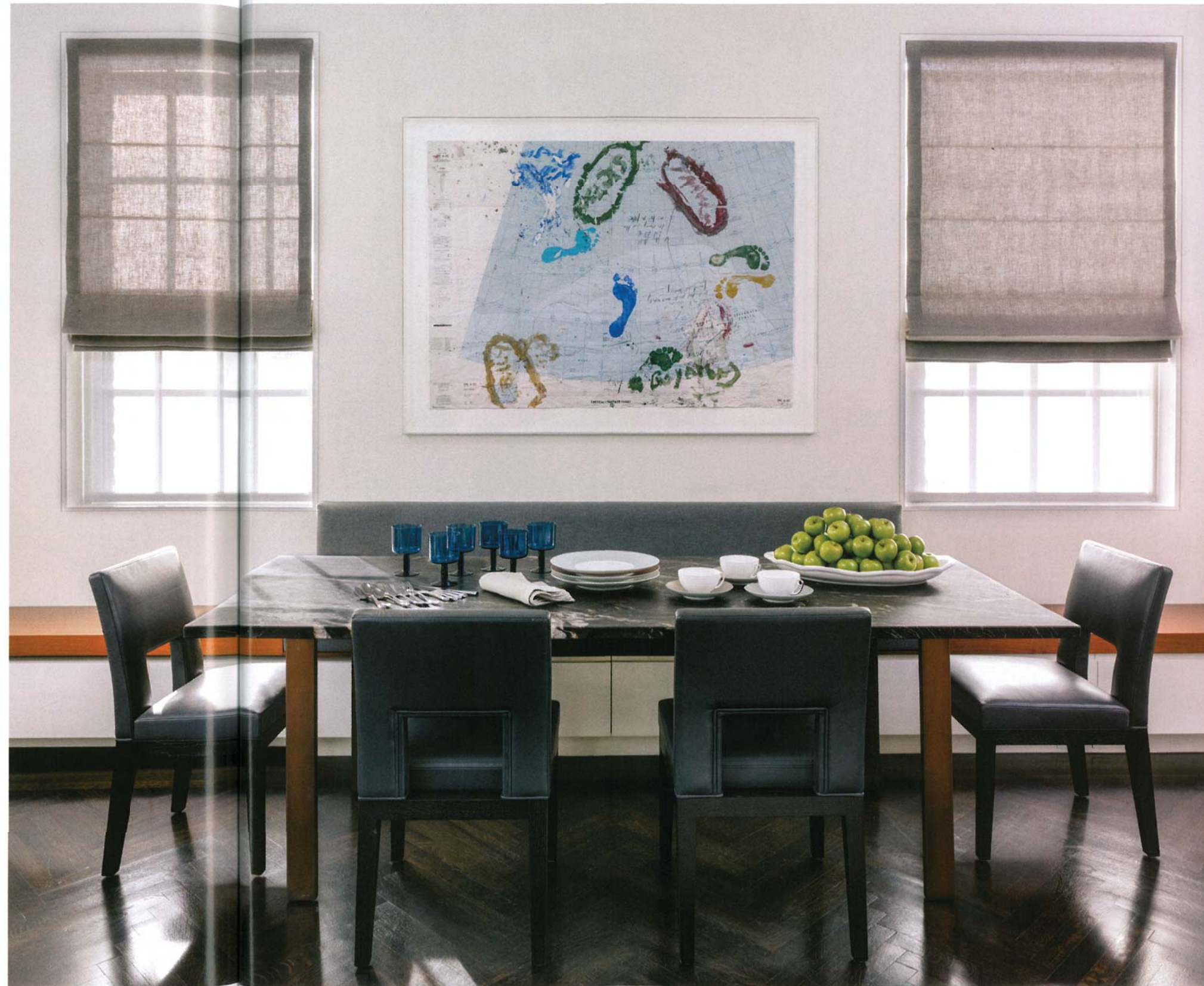




"EVERY ROOM WAS COMPLETELY  
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-MARY BURNHAM

**Below and opposite:** An informal room serves as both a breakfast nook and a casual sitting area where the family can relax. In the breakfast area, a stone table with an iron base from Desiron is complemented by Christian Liaigre chairs and a banquette covered in Pierre Frey wool fabric. Nearby, a custom iron-and-resin coffee table by Martha Sturdy sits atop a Stark carpet.







Israeli artist Arik Levy designed a sculpture within his Wireflow chandelier that hangs in the apartment's stairwell; it's deceptively modest at the bottom and only reveals itself as one climbs the stairs. The bench is by Caste Design through Holly Hunt.



Burnham eliminated wainscoting and a traditional banister that lined the former stairway, redesigning it to be integral with the architecture. Only the bottom of the chandelier is visible from the ground floor as it illuminates the *Dirty Laundry* clothespin sculpture by Venezuelan artist Gerry Stecca.



Frank King of Artistic Woodfinishing restored and refreshed the original paneling of the husband's office. Modern touches include a stone fireplace surround, a prism-like bar cabinet by Boca do Lobo and a leather-and-walnut desk by Promemoria. Yankee by photographer Hendrik Kerstens hangs over the mantel.



A traditional Chesterfield sofa might be the only expected piece in the husband's paneled office. Laxer added edge with a custom ottoman, iron-and-leather chairs from the David Gill Gallery in London and a vintage Moroccan patchwork rug.

bleached the paneling to brighten the space and installed LED lighting at the top to illuminate the ornate original ceiling, which they repaired and restored.

Wiener also rebuilt the stairway to Burnham and Laxer's design. "It was a complicated process," Wiener says of the staircase, a dramatic sculptural volume. "You're trying to make a very traditional prewar-architecture building fit today's standards." Building regulations required him to use original materials—wire mesh and plaster—to fabricate the stairs and replace walls and ceilings to accommodate the modern wiring, ductwork and central air. The result is stunning, wrapping the space around an arresting custom light fixture by Arik Levy that doubles as art. "It looks like

we're just illuminating the sculpture at the bottom of the stairs," Laxer says. "The surprise is, as you go up the stairs, you don't expect to find this other sculpture in a floating framework."

The second floor was revamped for today's standards, as well. Burnham redesigned the entire layout, adding a media room that doubles as a guest room with a custom Murphy bed, and vastly expanding the master suite to include a sleek bathroom, ample closets and a laundry room. It's exactly the kind of home where the owners can settle for the long term with their twin teenage boys. Living abroad, the wife says, "we never had a sense of permanence. This is finally a place we can live in forever." ■



In the master bedroom, pendant lights (one shown here) made with recycled glass and jeweler's wire by CL Sterling & Son hang like earrings over lacquered bedside tables by Pacific Connections. Laxer designed the leather-grid paneling that frames the bed. The linens are Frette.



**Above:** Laxer had a quilt fabricated from the silk scarves of the wife's late mother, and she lined it in cashmere by Holland & Sherry. It lies in the master bedroom across a chaise lounge by Homenature next to a New Antiques accent table by Marcel Wanders.

**Left:** A vintage Paolo Buffa vanity, purchased from a Paris flea market, highlights one wall in the master bedroom. Laxer paired it with a vintage brass seat she got through 1stdibs.





A chartreuse lounge and ottoman from B&B Italia sit in the corner of two walls of built-ins in the upstairs media room/guest room. The silhouette of Queen Elizabeth II was purchased at the Royal Academy of Arts; the accent table is vintage from Liberty of London.



Burnham combined two old bedrooms to create the new master suite, which includes a sleek bathroom with a Kohler tub and fixtures by Kallista. The floors, walls, sills and shower benches are clad in Calacatta Oro and Thassos marbles from Walker Zanger.