

HOME BOY

Globe-trotting writer and fashion-world insider *Derek Blasberg* conjures the perfect setting for his next chapter—a sophisticated Upper East Side apartment

TEXT BY **DEREK BLASBERG** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **GIEVES ANDERSON** STYLED BY **COLIN KING**



A CUSTOM VELVET SOFA CURVES TOWARD TWO OLIVIER MOURGUE CHAIRS IN THE SUNKEN LIVING ROOM. ON WILLY RIZZO COCKTAIL TABLE, MODEL OF BLASBERG'S DACHSHUND BY MIUCCIA PRADA. ARTWORKS BY FRANCESCO VEZZOLI (LEFT WALL) AND DAN COLEN (RIGHT). FOR DETAILS SEE RESOURCES.

I moved from St. Louis to New York in 2000, the year I turned 18 and graduated from high school. That means that last year, 2018, was the moment I had lived here for exactly as long as I had lived there. I didn't realize it at the time, but buying this apartment (my first real apartment!) on the Upper East Side was the ultimate inflection point in morphing from an overachieving Midwestern teenager into a New York City professional.

Consistency is the word I'd use to describe my first 18 years: I lived in the same bedroom in the same house in the same suburban neighborhood my whole life. (*Boring* is another word, but it's not as polite.) By the time I left, I had wallpapered the room—including the ceiling—with intricate collages made with cutouts from fashion magazines, filled the bookshelves with biographies of old Hollywood stars and Jackie Kennedy, and scribbled "New York or bust!" on my white cotton bedsheets with a black Sharpie.

In New York, my experiences in real estate were scattered. Literally. My first-ever address was an NYU dorm room on the west side of Washington Square Park. From there I moved to a walkup in Williamsburg, Brooklyn; a hovel in SoHo; a Tribeca high-rise; and, just before I moved into this place, a charming prewar building in Chelsea that featured the ultimate metropolitan extravagance: a doorman. To each apartment I'd drag all my earthly possessions, which consisted of clothes, clothes, and more clothes, and a burgeoning collection of embroidered pillows.

The thrill—if you want to call it that—of living in the city is that you never know what you're going to get. Sometimes you're lucky, like I was with the Chelsea pad, which had hardwood floors, a walk-in closet, and an insanely low rent. (In fact, that place was so cheap that when I finished renovations on this apartment I was tempted to renew my old lease just because I can never say no to a good deal.) Other times you're not so lucky, like the time my ex suddenly moved out in the middle of our shared lease, meaning I had to come up with twice as much money every month. He took all the pots and pans and my Eames lounge chair, but left the framed photos of us together.

You have to roll with the punches in New York. Could I have ever predicted my dream house would be on the Upper East Side? No way. I ended up here because two things changed in my early 30s: First, I met Nick Brown, my longtime boyfriend, who grew up in the 'hood. After we decided to buy a place together, he opened my eyes to local charms, like strolls in Central Park; coffees at quaint, overpriced cafés; and quiet night sounds that didn't feature bar fights and sirens. And second, on the UES this kind of apartment was, quite simply, less expensively priced per square foot than similar ones in Chelsea, the West Village, and parts of Brooklyn.

A real-estate agent didn't show us the place—we heard about it by eavesdropping. When I walked in I immediately had a good feeling: I had fantasized about a sunken living room ever since I saw Bette Davis's apartment in *All About Eve*. Also, there was enough space to build an elaborate "cloffice," a cute word Realtors invented for a closet that doubles as an office,



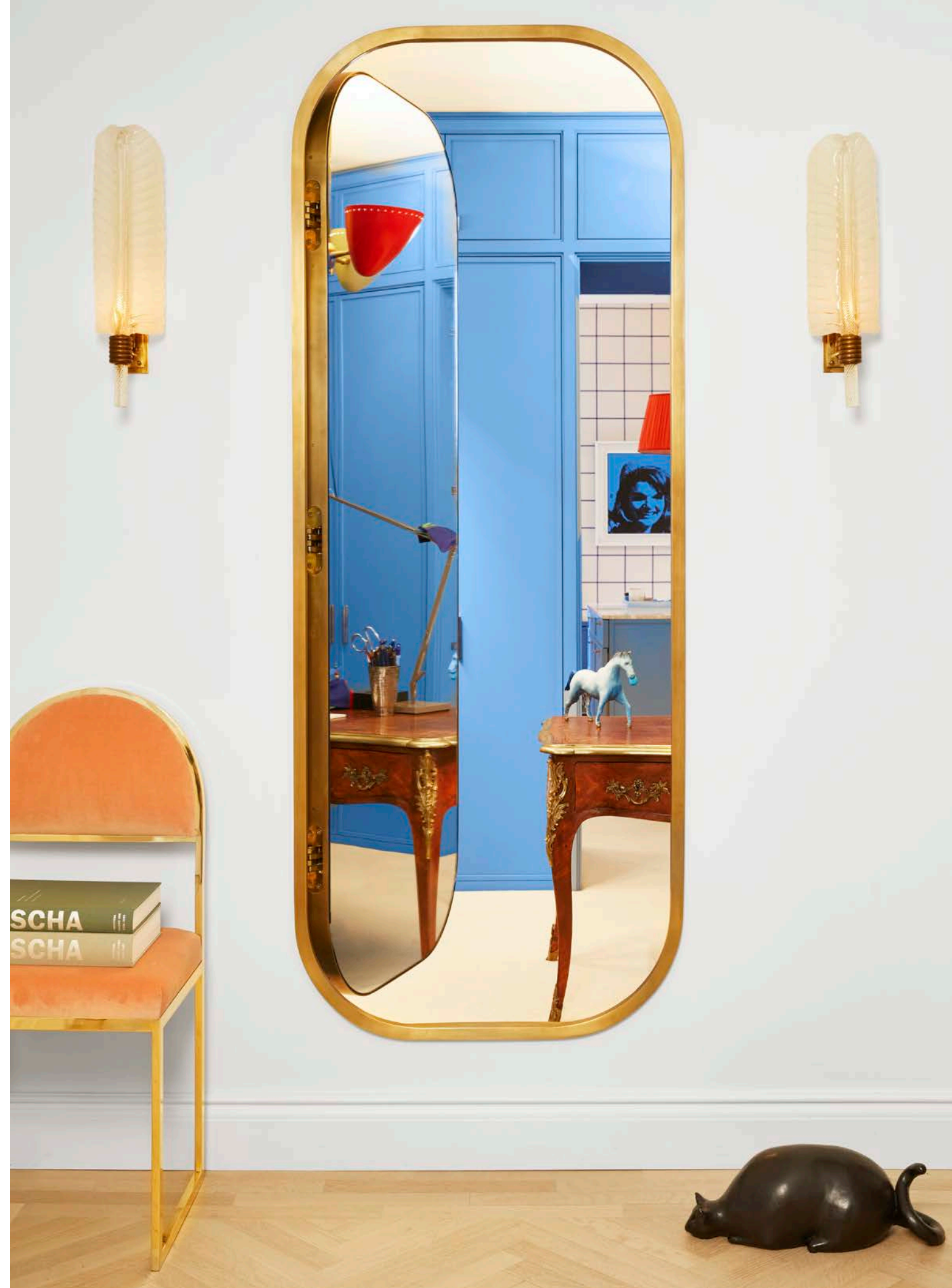
ABOVE BLASBERG AND HIS DOG, MONSTER. **OPPOSITE** A HIDDEN DOOR IN THE FOYER OPENS INTO BLASBERG'S OFFICE AND CLOSET. A WILLY RIZZO CHAIR WEARS A PINK VELVET BY PIERRE FREY; ANDRÉ ARBUS GLASS SCONCES; CAST-BRONZE CAT BY URS FISCHER.

and a Gossip Room, a cozy nest I devised in which to sit with friends and share secrets. The apartment had languished on the market for a few years, and when our offer was accepted in late 2016 I was equally excited and terrified. Nothing feels realer than a mortgage.

Contracts signed, we assembled our dream team: architectural designers Yaiza Armbruster and Marina Dayton and decorator Virginia Tupker. Things moved swiftly because our design directive was clear: a classic New York co-op (the building, a few steps from Central Park, was built in the 1920s) layered in youthful modernism. The heavy lifts included combining two small maids' quarters to create the Gossip Room and shifting a hallway to better organize the layout of the master bedroom, guest bedroom, and aforementioned cloffice. My request for a secret passage behind a mirror in the foyer to my desk required some clever engineering, and I love that it turned out resembling a glamorous submarine hatch.

I know it sounds hokey, but much of the design came to me in dreams. Once I woke up in the middle of the night and emailed Virginia about a vision of looking down at a Vladimir Kagan-style sofa centered in the living room. By the time I woke up she had it sketched out. I also dreamed of a guest bedroom in pastel pink, a gilded French desk, and an island in the closet to be used as base of operations for packing and

GROOMING BY REBECCA RYMATE FOR THE ART DEPARTMENT USING LEONOR GREYL AND CHANEL; WARHOL: © 2019 THE ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION FOR THE VISUAL ARTS, INC./LICENSED BY ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK





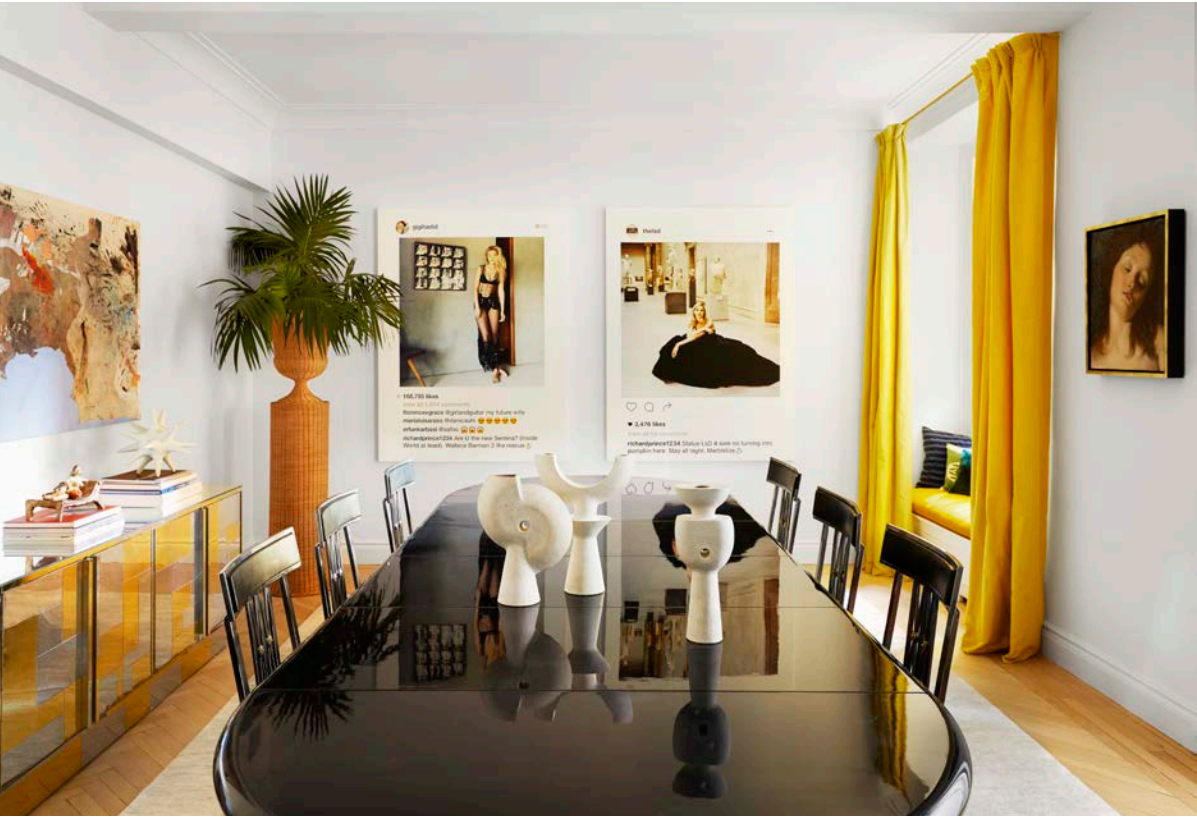
THE WALLS OF THE "CLOFFICE" ARE PAINTED IN FARROW & BALL'S COOK'S BLUE. VINTAGE STILNOVI CHANDELIER; ON ANTIQUE DESK, *CRYING HORSE* BY URS FISCHER. OPPOSITE A BANQUETTE IN THE DRESSING AREA DISPLAYS SOME OF BLASBERG'S EMBROIDERED-PILLOW COLLECTION.

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Our design directive was clear: a classic New York co-op layered with youthful touches of modernism.

RIGHT TWO RICHARD PRINCE INSTAGRAM PRINTS HANG IN THE DINING ROOM. PAINTING ON LEFT WALL BY NATE LOWMAN; ON RIGHT WALL BY JOHN CURRIN. BELOW THE GOSSIP ROOM IS COVERED IN A RALPH LAUREN HOME PRINT. OPPOSITE A CUSTOM-COLORED TATTERSALL BY RALPH LAUREN HOME COVERS THE MASTER BEDROOM WALLS, BED CANOPY, AND HEADBOARD. ABOVE BED, PAINTING BY FERNAND LÉGER.



unpacking luggage, which I do often as the head of fashion and beauty at YouTube. It's always Fashion Week somewhere!

A small-town boy moving to the big city is the classic American Dream. That's why when I was coordinating interiors the first designer I thought of was Ralph Lauren. The label's greatest contribution was textiles, specifically the graphic tattersall used on the walls, chaise longue, and curtains on the four-poster in the master bedroom. Ralph Lauren was also the source of the geometric print on the walls, sofa, and cushions in the Gossip Room—which I loved because it felt like a WASPy version of a hookah bar—and the luxe green velvet on that curvaceous sofa in the living room.

I had an incredible art mentor: mega dealer Larry Gagosian, whom I've worked with for half a decade. I asked my friend Dan Colen to create an installation of his stud paintings for the living room. Why studs? I thought the neighborhood needed something a little punk, and I loved how it looked like a giant wall of crushed-up disco balls. I sleep under a small Fernand Léger painting while my favorite fashion picture of all time, Richard Avedon's *Dovima with Elephants*, is hung by the front door so I can admire it whenever I'm coming or going. Much to my boyfriend's chagrin, his mother added to my embroidered-pillow collection when she gave me a pouf for the Gossip Room that reads: "If you can't say something nice about someone come sit by me."

The housewarming took place on my 36th birthday, and it turned out to be the perfect christening for a home to host my next 18 years. One friend spilled red wine on the white carpet. Another sent over a beer keg, which leaked all over the kitchen floor. People were smoking everywhere. Surprisingly, I was fine with every bit of it. After all, I had dreamed up this apartment (literally), and the stains made me realize I was actually living in it. ■

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