

"The rooms aren't separate entities; what matters is how they fit into an integrated whole," architect Lee F. Mindel says of the prewar Manhattan apartment he redesigned with his partner, Peter L. Shelton. A Tim Folzenlogen charcoal drawing hangs above an Alexandre Noll console in the entrance hall, which seamlessly flows into the living areas (right).

Let There Be Light

PREWAR SPACES OPEN UP TO CENTRAL PARK AND THE 21ST CENTURY

Interior Architecture and Design by
Shelton, Mindel & Associates
Text by Steven M. L. Aronson
Photography by Michael Moran



"There's nothing in the living room that's hard-edged—the architecture is rigorous, yet the landscape is much softer within," explains Shelton. "The space and the study beyond open up to the Fifth Avenue side of the apartment." The chairs are by Marco Zanuso.



It was a holistic project," the husband insists. "The goal was always the integration of the park, which we look out on—we're on the eighth floor, we just clear the treetops—with the architecture and the interior design: having it all hang together and be greater than the sum of its parts."

The more than 6,000-square-foot apartment that he

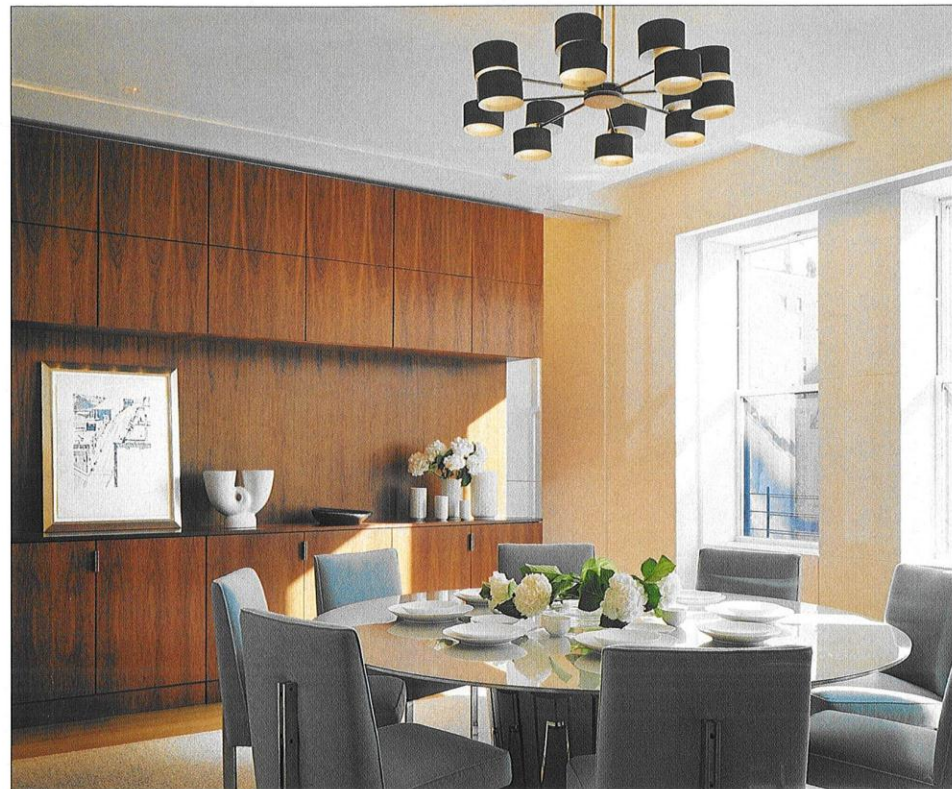
and his wife had purchased in a formidable prewar limestone building on Fifth Avenue hadn't been updated in decades—rectilinear unruliness reigned, with a welter of chopped-up reception rooms, narrow corridors and nasty little maids' rooms. As a family with three young children and attendant 21st-century needs, they realized that they would have to take the whole place

apart, down to the steel beams. The couple—he is a private investor and she an avid art collector—had long admired the work of the well-known Manhattan firm Shelton, Mindel. "We wanted their aesthetic," the wife says. "We envisioned a pristine combination of big open entertaining spaces and intimate private quarters."

"My only misgiving about a modernist approach," the hus-

band recalls, "was that the apartment might wind up not having a real family feeling—we didn't want any of the rooms to be off-limits to the kids, for one thing. But Shelton, Mindel put our minds totally at rest when they showed us the woods and the other materials they'd picked—terrazzo, Corian, limestone, bronze—all of which had a timelessness and a warmth to them."

The Fritz Henningsen leather chair in the living room, in contrast to the other furniture, "is more formal—it's like a booth," Mindel points out. "It was very important throughout the place to take advantage of the views of Central Park," he adds. In the corner is a Harry Bertioia sculpture.



ABOVE: Wayne Thiebaud's etching *Down 10th Street* is propped on top of the built-in walnut console in the dining room, which is illuminated by a Stilnovo chandelier. Epingle-covered Vladimir Kagan chairs are arranged around the Martin Szekely enameled-steel table.



RIGHT: "The millwork accents and the white element in the steel kitchen relate to other rooms, particularly the family room," notes Shelton. "The higher planes of the ceiling allow for ambient light." Corian counters, Bulthaup, Viking range, Refrigerator, Sub-Zero.

The clients' confidence in the two partners turned out to be anything but misplaced. You now emerge from a dark and dated elevator not into some stygian vestibule but into a kind of light box, all laminated sandblasted glass. "It's like entering an air bubble," Lee F. Mindel says. "You get a sense of optimism."

From there your eye is quickly drawn into the living room, and then, through the semi-transparent voile-and-linen draperies, out toward Central Park, where nature is waiting to stare you in the face.

The elevator shaft and the light box are contained in a voluminous white-lacquered construction that also houses

closets, a butler's pantry and a home office, and that, big as it is, floats on all four sides—you can circulate around it and even see right through it. In Peter Shelton's words, "It's aesthetics driven by function." The same can surely be said for the series of distinctive wall structures made of walnut that accommodate such

elements as fireplaces, televisions and storage—"It looks like we brought the hedges of the park right into our apartment," says the husband. These so-called hedges divide the living room from the study along the Fifth Avenue side, the dining room from the family room off the kitchen, and the public rooms from



the bedroom area; they all stand freely but with the help of hidden pocket doors (some opaque, some translucent) can completely enclose space.

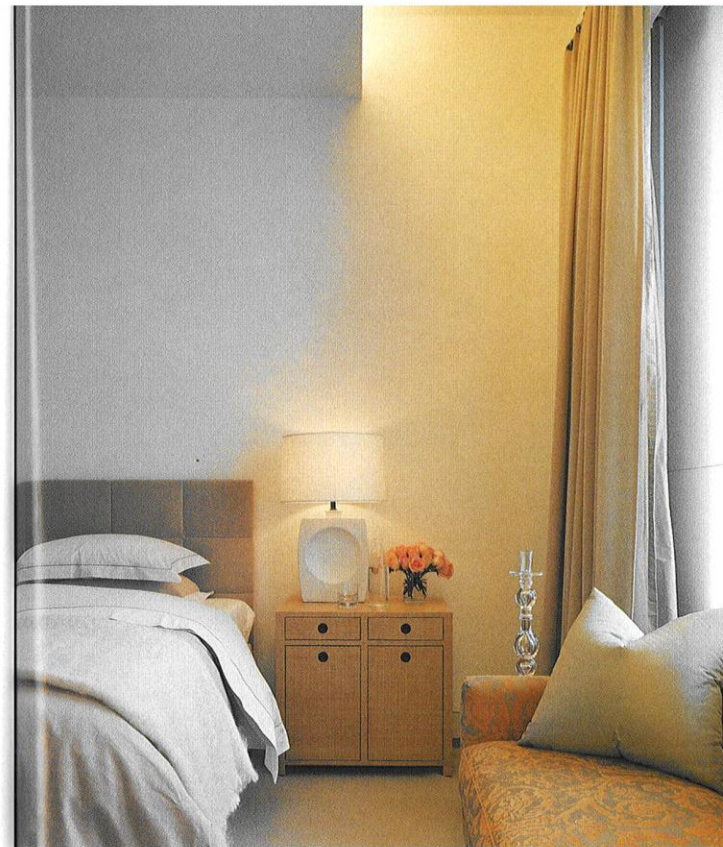
"The furniture here is curated—by choice and by intent; it's not just filling the space, it's a collection," Mindel stresses. The first piece you encounter, in the entrance, is a 1950

Alexandre Noll console of solid unstained mahogany; it has the primordial presence of a primitive sculpture, yet at the same time it's remarkably refined. With their soothing veneers, the Nolls alone (there's a 1950s Noll desk in the study) laid the ghost of the stark white modern apartment that had been the husband's fear.

In the living room: a sculptural 1950s Venini floor lamp, a soft-edged 1940s Finn Juhl settee, two 1947 polar bear club chairs designed by Jean Royère for the Russian embassy in Paris—Italy, Denmark and France, so to speak, all sitting down together in peace and amity, having an international conversation. One

The imposing walnut-and-bronze fireplace wall in the study that conceals the television "is freestanding; it's independent of the window wall." Poul Henningsen lamps rest before it. The wood sculpture and the desk are by Alexandre Noll. Byng created the acrylic piece.

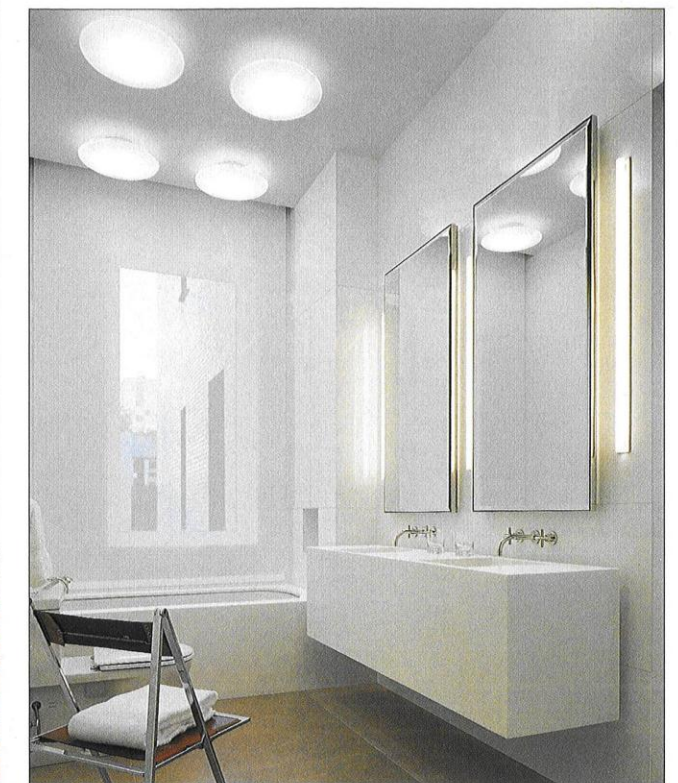
"Children love color, and we used it in a pure, not hokey, way," says Shelton. "The clients' kids were involved in picking out their favorites." The boys' rooms can be utilized as a suite or, when a hidden panel is closed, remain separate. A Peder Moos table is by a Pierre Jeanneret chair.



that, before it is over, will be joined by the likes of Poul Kjaerholm, Jean Prouvé, Verner Panton, Arne Jacobsen, Georges Jouve, Vladimir Kagan, George Nakashima, Charlotte Perriand, Preben Fabricius, Børge Mogensen, Marco Zanuso and Peder Moos. "It's like a U. N. conference," Shelton quips.

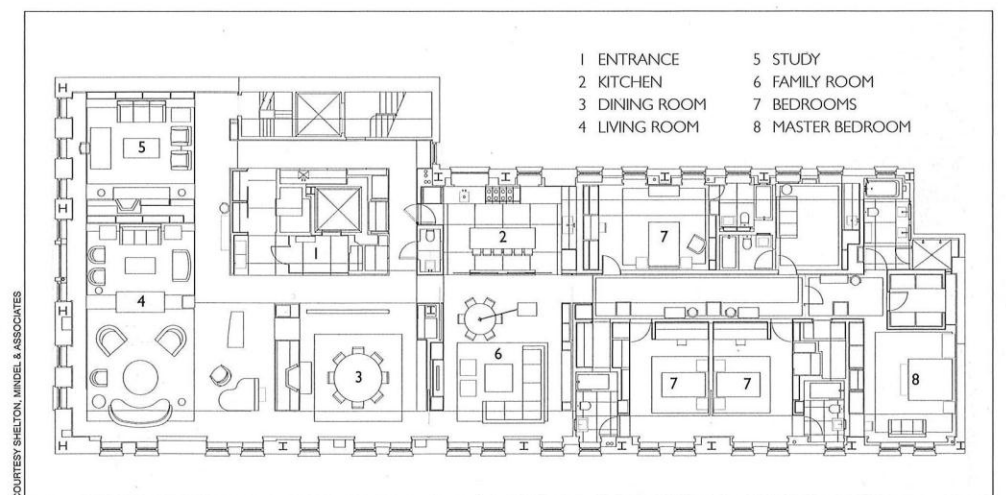
As for palette, it's almost as if the park had painted itself on the canvas that was the apartment. Line Vautrin's 1950s looking glass of resin and mirror chips that hangs over the dining room mantel—"It's almost a piece of jewelry, and purposely underscale because of its richness," Mindel points out—picks up the color of the walnut hedges. The upholstery fabric on the 1950s Royère sofa in the study is the color of the retaining wall of the Central Park reservoir just across Fifth Avenue. The enameled-steel dining table with its automobile-like finish is the color of the reservoir itself, and the light fixture

is reflected in the tabletop as if in water. Kjaerholm's 1960s saddle-colored leather daybed in the living room is a kind of domestic park bench. The Harry Bertoua sculpture over in the corner could be mistaken for a tree,



and the Royère sofa hard by it is the pale apple green of tree buds. The 1950s Danish cabinetmaker's floor lamp in the room reads like a caterpillar that crawled out of the park—it doesn't get much more organic than that.

"There had to be a device, some version of a landing pad, whereby all this furniture could be grounded—especially in the corner of the living room, with its two exposures—so we went to *continued on page 161*



COURTESY SHELTON, MINDEL & ASSOCIATES

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the drawing board and came up with what we call the rug constructions," says Shelton. He and Mindel repaired to the Manhattan-based firm of V'Soske. Two rugs for the living room were soon being tufted on a wool berber grid and set asymmetrically within a modern, flat, Aubusson-textured field reminiscent, in its order and serenity, of a raked-gravel Japanese garden. A rug for the dining room followed—woven in concentric circles to evoke a pool of water that someone tossed a pebble in; one for the family room came next—thicker and denser, like a blanket.

For the rugs for their own rooms, "the kids actually went with Lee to the V'Soske studio," the husband recounts. "One of my sons sketched a smiley face, and the other signed his name, to be woven into the fields of their rugs. My daughter loves pink and yellow, so she drew a little lemon cut in half—to be inscribed right in her big Pepto-Bismol—pink rug." The wife fills in, "The kids love all the furniture in the apartment because of the friendly, playful shapes."

The master bedroom, located at the far end of the long, wide gallery, fits the definition of *removed*. The V'Soske there—a reduced-in-scale and more concentrated version of the rugs in the living room—speaks softly to the cashmere-and-taffeta draperies; the mortar-colored, biscuit-tufted headboard that is suggestive of the park-bench-like Kjaerholm daybed in the living room; the two Shelton, Mindel-designed raffia night tables; and the Shelton, Mindel sofa upholstered in Fortuny fabric, of all beautiful stuffs. On the walls are two painterly Fairfield Porters. There are four others in the apartment. "He was our inspiration to collect art," the husband explains. "For us, he captures a whole way of living—a very comfortable, relaxed way of living."

"Not only does the apartment reflect us," he adds, "not only is it warm and welcoming, but thanks to Peter and Lee's eye for scale, color and texture, not to mention great furniture, it's a place quite unlike anybody else's. I mean, we see it all as a piece of art—an artwork that they created and we contributed to. That's absolutely how we look at it." □