

# INTERIORS<sup>®</sup>

ART IN  
DESIGN







## HIGH IMPACT

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**The conventional trajectory goes something like this:**

Move to the city, find an apartment, build a career, make a name for yourself, find a bigger and nicer apartment, partner up, have some kids (if that's on the agenda), move to a stately home on Long Island, renovate it, and live out the rest of one's life in gladed tranquility—close enough to Manhattan that you're still umbilically connected to the place where it all got started, but far enough away that engaging with the city's hustle and bustle is always optional, at your discretion.

Sometimes, though, there's a twist ending. For one married couple with grown children, life in their Long Island home—modeled after a French chateau, about as stately as they come—no longer provided the thrill that it once had. And so they decided to reverse the trajectory and move back into the city, this time as empty-nesters who would be able to take advantage of all that Manhattan has to offer in a more unencumbered frame of mind.

"This was a real departure from the way the clients had been living previously," says Rendell Fernandez, the designer the couple asked to help them with their urban repatriation. "But the idea of having a modern apartment was really enticing for them. Their kids were leaving the nest, they were moving to Manhattan—it was a real life change. They wanted a sophisticated apartment that would mark this new outlook. And ultimately they found one—or the shell of one, at least—along that long, wide boulevard that for so many is the essence of Manhattan elegance, purely distilled: Park Avenue.

As Studio Director at Pembroke & Ives, the New York-based design firm that has been crafting luxurious yet livable spaces for an international roster of clients for more than three decades now, Fernandez was more than up for the task of giving the clients what they wanted—sleek sophistication—without asking them to give up what they had become accustomed to in their previous home: openness and airiness. The key, he says, was to balance modernity with warmth.

With his fellow designer Andrew Sheinman, Pembroke & Ives' founder, Fernandez set about creating the apartment that fit the clients' distinct, highly personalized vision of a new life in New York. They had their work cut out for them. The residence, like so many grand apartments of its prewar era, was formal down to its bones: a relic of a time when cooks and servants frequently lived with families, but were typically sequestered in small rooms at a remove from the family's living, dining and sleeping areas. The apartment his clients had purchased contained servants' quarters as well as a service kitchen, both of which desperately needed "to be rolled into a modern living space to meet today's needs," Fernandez says.





**For these clients, at least, “today’s needs”**

included the one for an open, inviting, ergonomic kitchen—including bar seating, from Mater, and a breakfast area—where guests would feel comfortable congregating. But a structural column that had once helped to demarcate the servant’s rooms was quite literally standing in the way of the desired effect. Instead of fighting the column, Fernandez and Sheinman decided to welcome it into the plan by sheathing it in the same semi-translucent white Corian they had used for the countertops, turning what had once been an annoying obstacle into a design element. “Sometimes,” Fernandez says, “you just have to try to overpower these anomalies by integrating them into a larger system where you can actually make less of them, visually speaking.”

Elsewhere, this same cooperative spirit prevailed as the designers found ways to work with, rather than against, the limitations posed by the apartment’s interior architecture. The clients had wanted wine refrigerators built into the dining room walls, but the depth of the appliance wouldn’t allow for it. So a wine refrigerator “island” was built instead, and it now sits opposite the dining configuration—twin wooden tables from Egg Collective flanked by a custom banquette on one side and a sextet of Jorge Zalsupin armchairs on the other, plus a photograph by James Casebere—commanding respectful attention of its own as a discrete design element (not to mention a very useful buffet).

In the living room, Fernandez and Sheinman dropped the ceilings—replacing the air conditioning systems once contained within their beams with a ductless, console-based system that can be more or less hidden beneath windows—to achieve what Fernandez describes as “really clean planes.” Below them, custom pieces, vintage items, and designer-crafted furnishings combine to foster a decidedly post-war atmosphere of calm, unpretentious luxury: among them, a carpet from Fort Street Studio; a Pembroke & Ives sectional; a pair of bronze Puddle cocktail tables from Stefan Bishop; and a 1960s Murano floor lamp from Venini. The bright metal of those tables is foreshadowed in the entry’s Niamh Barry chandelier, which hangs above a mirrored art piece by Nick Mauss.

Almost all of the pulls, knobs, and handles in the apartment are custom: a special treat made possible by a collaboration between Pembroke & Ives and Hamilton Sinkler, the maker of fine architectural hardware. “They came to us and offered us the chance to do it,” Fernandez says. Creating a family of hardware pieces that were all connected materially and visually became “a way to really unify the project.”

Entire aesthetics, of course, are built on the tiniest of details. And for a couple who dreamed of returning to sophisticated city life after decades spent at a geographical and cultural remove, those details make all the difference. Their new home is sleek modernity grafted onto prewar gentility: where Cole Porter would want to live if he were alive today, penning new standards in the age of Spotify. In Rendell Fernandez’s soft-spoken summation: “I think that it all came together.” ■ *Pembroke & Ives, pembrokeandives.com*





