

INTROSPECTIVE MAGAZINE

DESIGNER SPOTLIGHT

European Finesse Meets New World Freshness in Alexander Doherty's Spaces



The British-born, New York-based art consultant turned interior designer finds inspiration on both sides of the pond.

by Jane Garmey

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Alexander Doherty pursued careers in art advising, acting and textile sales before turning to interior design. Top: In the dining room of a classic eight on New York's Upper West Side, ladder-back [mid-century dining chairs](#), found on 1stdibs, surround a [Roche Bobois](#) table, and two [Abstract Expressionist paintings](#) by unknown British artists flank built-in bookshelves. All photos by Marcus Chira

Asked what people like about his work, [Alexander Doherty](#) takes a moment before replying. “I think my appeal from an American perspective is that I bring a European sensibility,” says the British-born, New York-based interior designer. “I probably don’t have the crispness you often see stateside.” He pauses again, smiles and adds a caveat: “But I do think a certain new-world freshness has invaded my spirit over the years.”

Doherty developed his European sensibility during a decade spent living and working as an art adviser in Paris, where he still keeps an apartment and regularly scours the flea markets. In 1997, he came to New York from France to pursue an acting career. Giving private French lessons to support himself led to the unexpected offer of a job at Travers Fabric House. By that point, he'd come to feel that acting was perhaps not his true calling. So, he joined Travers as a national sales director, a position that took him around the country, meeting interior decorators. This, in turn, reminded him of a childhood fascination with complex architecture, eventually sparking his passion for design.



The foyer of another Upper West Side apartment, this one a classic seven, features three artworks by Christian Brechneff and an antique settee that Doherty had recovered in three different shades of gray velvet.

In 2006, following a brief design apprenticeship, he went out on his own, redecorating the apartments of two friends, pro bono. Those friends, folks who moved in high-powered circles, spread the word about the up-and-comer, and within six months, Doherty had his first paying client. Since then, his clientele has continued to expand, thanks to word-of-mouth recommendations and features in shelter publications.

Doherty's style is sophisticated but relaxed, characterized by careful attention to detail. The look he creates is gracious and largely traditional, but it also embraces modern lighting and a few well-chosen contemporary pieces, not least among these artworks. Doherty believes paintings and sculpture are key to successful interiors. His own apartment is filled with art, including pieces by two of his favorites: painter Oscar Troneck and sculptor and painter Art Brenner, whom he frequently recommends to his clients. And he likes nothing better than being asked to acquire artwork for homeowners.



To update the furniture in the classic seven's living room, Doherty recovered all the chairs and the sofa in a neutral wool fabric and gave the fireplace a new Art Deco mantel. He sourced the metal and glass coffee table in Paris, where he lived for a decade and still keeps an apartment.

Often, of course, his high-flying clients have artworks of their own — although sometimes, they don't realize what they have. While redoing a classic seven on New York's Upper West Side for an older couple who had lived there many years, he came across a numbered Alexander Calder print that had been forgotten in a closet. Framed, it now holds pride of place in the dining room, presiding over the owners' early-20th-century table, which is surrounded by their mahogany chairs newly spiffed up with a flame-stitch fabric.



For a bit of flair, Doherty again turned to new upholstery in the home's dining room, refreshing the owners' chairs with a flame-stitch fabric. The artwork over the settee is a numbered Alexander Calder print that the decorator found hidden in the back of one of the clients' closets.

In the living room, he worked similar reupholstery magic, recovering all the chairs and sofas with a neutral wool fabric and giving the fireplace a new Art Deco mantel. To this ensemble, he added mid-20th-century lamps and a striking metal and glass coffee table found on 1stdibs, which provides the room with a focal point it previously lacked — as well as a note of that new-world freshness.



A Phillip Jeffries silk wallpaper gives the classic eight's entry a richness it previously lacked. The glass waterfall console is by [Leon Rosen](#).

Designing a classic eight for a couple with young children, also on the Upper West Side, Doherty faced a different sort of challenge. The previous owner, in residence for 25 years, had updated nothing, so the new occupants needed to earmark much of their renovation budget for essential plumbing and electrical work. Faced with limited funds, Doherty persuaded his clients to redo only the apartment's interconnected living room, dining room and foyer rather than stretching the money across the entire square footage. The other rooms could come later.

Given a mandate to reimagine the entry and entertaining spaces in a way that was, he says, “comfortable but not stuffy,” Doherty chose a pale palette of various grays to create a feeling of openness and lightness. The couple’s architect had planned for a built-in bookcase to run across one entire wall in the dining room. Doherty prevailed on his clients to reduce its size to allow for small consoles, made by an independent Brooklyn furniture company, on either side. Above these, he hung two British Abstract Expressionist pieces he’d purchased at Paris flea markets and was waiting to find the perfect spot for.



Doherty designed a custom sofa for the living room, seen here from the dining room. The painting over the couch is by Sacha Kolin. The two mid-century armchairs were found on 1stdibs.

The room’s slate and oak dining table came from Roche Bobois, and Doherty found the mid-century rosewood ladder-back chairs surrounding it on 1stdibs. The site also provided the two mid-century armchairs in the living room. He designed the living room’s custom wool-unholstered walnut framed sofa, pairing it with muted rugs and gray curtains.

Wanting the entrance hall, which also leads to the bedrooms, to inject an initial dose of drama, Doherty chose a platinum-hued silk wallpaper. “The silk provides a beautiful sheen that dresses the walls in a way that paint never could,” he says. To the right of the door, he placed a simple glass console, also found on 1stdibs, with an oversize wavy, plaster-framed mirror and flanking sconces above. An alabaster lamp from Circa Modern hangs from the ceiling. The overall effect is of pared-down grandeur, exemplifying his approach of imbuing European design details with originality.



To create a feeling of age in an apartment in a new building in New York's West Village, Doherty added classical paneling to the walls. He complemented this traditional touch in the living room with a custom sofa and chairs, an early-19th-century Charles X mantel, lamps by Vaughan, a parchment coffee table by Christian Liaigre and an Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann-inspired rug. The stools in front of the fireplace were designed by Jonathan Burden in the manner of Jean-Michel Frank.

While working on an apartment in a brand-new building in the West Village, Doherty had to navigate between a couple whose design desires seemed in direct conflict: He wanted an established look while she was after a relaxed Village feel with nothing stiff. Doherty had to

thread that needle while also giving the just-completed construction an air of age and permanence. His first move was to clad the walls of the dining and living rooms and the entrance hallway — essentially a narrow, windowless, 30-foot-long tunnel — with traditional wood paneling. He then conceived a timeless, elegant decor. The living room now boasts an early-19th-century French Charles X mantel, along with custom upholstered chairs and sofas, Vaughan lamps and a parchment coffee table by Christian Liaigre atop an Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann-inspired rug. He complemented the scheme with carefully placed decorative objects, including a bust by Stephen Antonson, who also made the chandelier. Doherty selected all the art in the home, mostly modern pieces plus a large contemporary work by French artist Marielle Guégan, whose oeuvre Doherty discovered in Paris. Walking into the apartment today, one would never guess it was built only two years ago.



The paneling continues in the home's kitchen, whose table comes from BDDW.

Next up for Doherty are, among other large projects, a duplex in the West Village and a 5,000-square-foot penthouse in a Madison Square Park high-rise. He's excited to bring to these his unmatched energy, enthusiasm and diplomatic skills, not to mention his strong sense of design. But if one thing pleases him most about the homes on his docket right now, it is that he will be looking for a lot of fine art for each.

"Layering different pieces of art brings culture and history to a home, and that gives a sense of depth," he says, concluding, "Art tells a story. And that is what ultimately personalizes a home, taking it from the utilitarian to the special." **1**

Alexander Doherty's Quick Picks
