

# PRIMARY INSTINCTS

UNDERSTATED ELEGANCE AND  
JUICY COLOR INFORM THE DESIGN  
OF AN EAST END APARTMENT.

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To counterbalance the blue in the dining room, designer Alexander Doherty selected a statement-making hue, Benjamin Moore's Forest Hills Green, for the library. He sourced a daybed and lounge chair by the Danish designer Frits Henningsen to lend midcentury modern flair. Both circa 1940s creations are newly upholstered in Holland & Sherry fabrics.



**N**ot much of Manhattan resists change, but the river-hugging stretch of Yorkville known as East End Avenue has put up an admirable fight. Graced by Astor-era limestone fortresses and overlooking the urban oasis of Carl Schurz Park, the 11-block enclave has managed to retain a sense of quietude and old New York charm.

For a dynamic family, the neighborhood offered a buying opportunity of similar appeal: a prewar duplex with its original floor plan intact. “The grandness was very attractive to me—the tall windows and light,” says the husband. “We looked at new construction buildings, but they just didn’t have the same kind of elegant layouts. It was always a combined living-family-room-kitchen-all-in-one space.” In a world of continuous sight lines and smart-home devices, the discovery of such a classic floor plan felt exhilarating. “It’s one of those wonderful buildings built in a time when gracious living was very much the norm,” echoes U.K.-born designer Alexander Doherty, whom the couple was referred to by a mutual friend. “The scale of the rooms and architecture is really wonderful. You walk into the apartment and straight away you think, ‘Okay, I’m somewhere!’”

“It’s definitely a color story,” continues the designer of his concept. “The client got excited about the use of different colors in blocks. When you get out of the elevator, we have a very painterly wallpaper on the wall, which has a stripe in a mustard color. I said, ‘Well if we do that in mustard, why don’t we paint the front door a really strong kind of lipstick red?’” Taking its cue from the threshold, bold hues thread throughout the home, surfacing in surprising details like the walk-in wet bar, where Doherty added yet another spunky hit of red to a shelving unit, and in the living room, where a striking blue work by the artist Caio Fonseca commands attention above the fireplace.

But the bravest show of color happens off of the black-and-white marble checkered foyer, where doorways act as picture frames highlighting the vibrant rooms within. In the dining room, Doherty inherited the Delft blue wall paint, which he chose to embrace and soften with pale gray tones on the woodwork and trim. Recognizing that the spacious room would be underutilized as dining quarters for 30, the designer cleverly thought to reorient a smaller-scale table horizontally with the back wall, and in doing so, freed up real estate for an adjacent lounge area for cocktail parties and weeknight hangouts alike.

Directly across the way, the library, which serves as both a study for the husband and a reading room for the

children, proves a worthy counterpoint with its grassy green hue. “I wanted something that was going to be as intense as the blue on the other side, but it’s an office and green is a good, calming color,” says Doherty, “and all of that beige, creamy woodwork acts as a really nice foil.” Of his saturated approach, the designer explains, “I am somebody who believes in color—I think it makes people happy. These are not the kind of clients that need to live inside a white box.”

Complementing the scheme, Doherty next sourced vintage pieces with clean lines and provenance, mingling them among the couple’s existing furniture in fresh configurations. The family owns a summer house in Michigan built in 1959 and particularly appreciates that era in design—an interest the designer celebrated by scouring Paris markets and antiques shops for midcentury treasures, texting photos to his clients along the way. Notable additions include the mahogany writing desk, wingback chair and daybed in the library, all of which are by Frits Henningsen, a Danish cabinetmaker who designed during the midcentury but whose work appears distinct from the period’s usual hitmakers.

While the architecture and furnishings speak to eras past, there’s no denying that this is a modern home meant for a modern family. “Alexander’s style has a richness to it, but it’s very livable, not frivolous or fussy,” says the husband of Doherty’s ability to balance chic with easy, sophistication with comfort. Adds the designer, “The idea here is simply a very elegant, composed space.” A timeless ethos that the apartment’s predecessors—Astor or otherwise—would surely approve of. ■

**IN A WORLD OF  
CONTINUOUS SIGHT  
LINES, A CLASSIC  
FLOOR PLAN FELT  
EXHILARATING.**





The husband's vintage mahogany writing table in the study is another Frits Henningsen addition, with a gilt ceramic table lamp by Andrea Koeppel. Ample built-ins painted in Benjamin Moore's Coastal Fog house the family's treasured collection of books and objets d'art.



Further proof that "paint is your best friend," as Doherty says, the view into the powder room celebrates the dynamic between color and pattern. Farrow & Ball's exuberant Lotus wallcovering is paired with Barbara Barry for Circa sconces and a Waterworks sink. The painting above the bar cart is by artist Metra Mitchell.

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Creating an informal lounge within the dining room was Doherty's masterful stroke. The 1950s Edward Wormley walnut table can be extended to accommodate additional guests, and in the sitting area, Doherty paired a set of the clients' existing armchairs with a 1960's Børge Mogensen-style sofa by Mogens Hansen. The hand-knotted rug is by Stark Carpet.





**Opposite:** When the family entertains, the walk-in wet bar located just off the dining room serves as a festive spot to mix libations. Playing off the patterned floor tiles and antique mirrored backsplash, Doherty swathed the millwork in Farrow & Ball's cheeky Rectory Red.

**Below:** In the kitchen, which underwent a sleek update prior to his arrival, Doherty incorporated another color-block moment by painting the bookcase in Farrow & Ball's Inchyra Blue. At the breakfast table, a mix of vintage dining chairs by Eames and Niels Otto Møller are situated below an artwork by Maurice Golubov.







**Above:** The master bathroom reads clean and classic with its crisp white palette. The backsplash, console sink and floor tile are all by Waterworks, and Doherty went the extra mile of including window seat cushions from de Le Cuona.

**Left:** The process of decorating is "about making the environment in which you live a more agreeable place," Doherty says. The inviting master bedroom delivers on that sentiment, mixing existing pieces from the couple's collection with midcentury finds like the brass, steel and oak floor lamp and new textural elements in the rug from The Rug Company and bedding from Schweitzer Linen.