

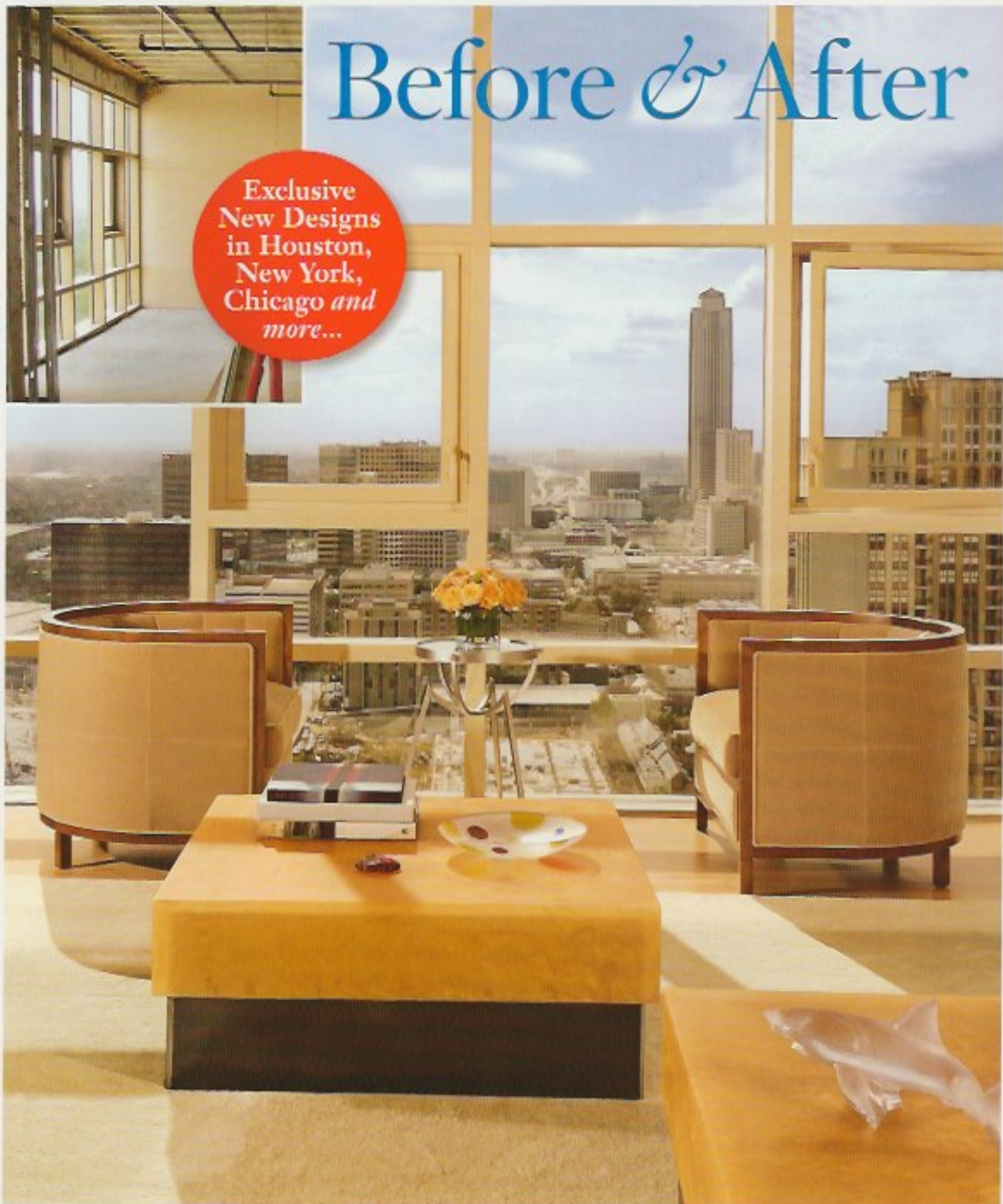
ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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FEBRUARY 2009

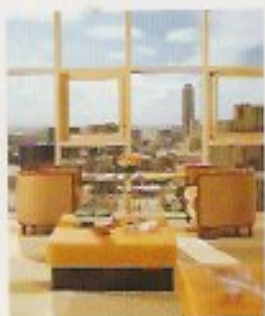
Before & After

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ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

FEBRUARY 2009



COVER: The living room of a penthouse overlooking Houston by architect Robert A. Levy and interior designer Melinda Brizzolara Corder. After photography by Mary E. Nichols. See page 26. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The enclosed porch of a restored Colonial Revival house near Philadelphia. See page 146.

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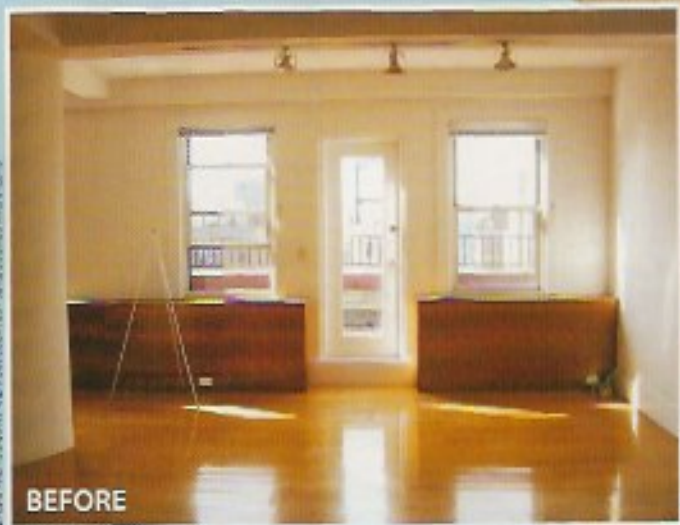
IN MANHATTAN, AN APARTMENT OPENS TO THE SKY AND THE HUDSON RIVER

Interior Architecture by
Siris/Coombs Architects

Interior Design by Jason Bell

Text by John Loring

After Photography by Durston Saylor



On New York's Upper West Side, architects Jane Siris and Peter Coombs combined two penthouse apartments into a single residence. Jason Bell did the interior design. ABOVE AND RIGHT: In the living/dining area, the architects replaced a large column with a bookshelf unit and installed French doors. "The windows were sort of arguing with what we were trying to do spatially," says Siris. Bergamo fabric on armchairs. Hope's windows and French doors throughout.





The exterior walls of the old apartment were felled to make way for



BEFORE

Although not celebrated in song—unlike their downstairs neighbors the sidewalks of New York—Manhattan's rooftops are in no way lacking in vernacular charm. Residents of the Upper West Side see panoramic cityscapes composed of the often massive ornamental architectural details of vintage apartment buildings, mixed with the city's omnipresent wooden water tanks, as something of illimitable poetic beauty. That beauty might well escape the notice of

visitors who stick to the sidewalks, but it has long fascinated Jane Siris and Peter Coombs, of Siris/Coombs Architects, a firm more than 30 years old that is noted for its Modernist penthouse designs.

The allure of rooftop architecture springs from a number of advantages, Peter Coombs explains. "All the decoration of the older Upper West Side buildings occurs at the top, at the line of the parapets and copings, and these older buildings were structured so that two- or even three-story ad-



AFTER

luminous American Déco-style steel casement doors and windows.

ditions can be built on top of them. This can be, as in the case of our most recent penthouse renovation, a stand-alone dwelling," he says, "one that creates a unique way to live in New York—a very light and open place where life unfolds gracefully, where you watch the weather change in your own cityscape."

The architects combined two penthouse apartments that were in a neglected state but had a lot of natural light and panoramic Hudson River views.

"Given the buildable square footage," Siris explains, "we were constrained to design within a long and narrow space." They placed the entrance hall in the middle to bridge the two apartments; a vaulted oculus contributes visual height. "The corridor connecting the foyer to the living spaces to the west, which orients to Hudson River views," she notes, "is modulated by a sequence of ceiling vaults, casement windows, interior doors and a floor patterned in concentric squares to create a rhythm with the new windows and ceiling coffers." The corridor to the east of the entrance hall leads to the bedrooms.

The exterior walls of the old apartments were quickly felled to make way for the luminous procession of American Déco-style steel casement doors and windows that surrounds the new penthouse.

Seasoned New York designer Jason Bell undertook the interior design. "At first," he remembers, "there was no clear direction." The clients were living in a traditional Upper West Side apartment with lots of antiques, an antique-



ABOVE: Interior designer Jason Bell. RIGHT: The floor plans. Making everything flow was a challenge, says Siris. "The apartment was very long."

blue palette and a baby grand piano in the living room—but they had hired a resolutely modern architectural firm. The apartment they were building clearly didn't allow for their solidly traditional tastes or for their antiques. "My position," he says, "was to make them understand a cleaner look with less detail, to lead them down simple lines to a calm, pared-down interior where they could enjoy the beauty of the architecture and the views. Rather than doing camelback or scroll-arm furnishings, we kept it very streamlined.

"One thing the lady of the house was determined to retain from the old apartment was her favorite blue," says Bell. The hues chosen for the new interiors were all based on moderating that traditional blue. "Every



- 1 ENTRANCE HALL
- 2 LIVING AREA
- 3 DINING AREA
- 4 KITCHEN/FAMILY ROOM

- 5 BREAKFAST AREA
- 6 WIFE'S STUDY
- 7 HUSBAND'S STUDY
- 8 EAST GALLERY

- 9 MASTER BEDROOM
- 10 MASTER BATH
- 11 GUEST ROOMS
- 12 PLAYROOM

OPPOSITE ABOVE AND OPPOSITE: Siris and Coombs (top right) added a window on the northern wall of the dining area, which adjoins the living space. They assembled "a large enough space for the living area/dining area/kitchen," says Siris, "so they could all be together." The painting is by Louise Fishman. John Boone dining and end tables. Drapery sheer, Rogers & Goffigon.

"Given the buildable square footage," Siris explains, "we were constrained to design within a long and narrow space."



Varying shades of blue were used throughout the residence. "We were playing around with the intensities of that color," says the designer. **TOP LEFT AND ABOVE:** A portion of a living room was turned into a sleek, state-of-the-art kitchen. Sub-Zero refrigerator, at Abt.com.

TOP RIGHT AND OPPOSITE: Formerly a bedroom with a sleeping loft, the breakfast area has large windows that open the corner to the light and views. Of the Warren Platner table and Jesús Gasca chairs, Bell says, "It had to be the type of furniture that you can look through but is beautiful to look at."



AFTER



BEFORE



BEFORE



AFTER

afternoon, however, the setting sun floods the structure from the west and paints the rooms a warm and friendly yellow," he says, "so we took that sun color as a strong base for the central foyer to pop and blend with the outdoors."

The owners wanted to keep their baby grand piano, which is the most traditional piece in the apartment. "It seemed at first to be anachronistic in the modern interior," Bell remembers. "However, it became a wonderfully sculptural piece in a corner that was almost unusable."

"All in all, this whole voyage away from the traditional was an experience where everyone learned a lot," says the designer. "Not knowing which way it was going to go in the end intrigued us, but aesthetically we all came together." And one can conclude about Bell's dapper and elusively colorful interior that it is, indeed, an ideal spot to "trip the light fantastic on the [rooftops] of New York." □

ABOVE LEFT AND LEFT: In the master bath, which is informed by bold blue tiles, French doors flanking the tub lead out to the adjacent terrace. Edelman leather on bench.

ABOVE AND OPPOSITE: "There were three very tall slit windows," Siris says of the master bedroom, which overlooks the Hudson River, "so we made one big window." Drapery silk, Lee Jofa. Console, John Boone.