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Interior Design by Charles Allem and Colin Cowie
Text by Annette Tapert/Photography by Durston Saylor

THE ART OF ENTERTAINING

AT HOME ON THE UPPER EAST SIDE WITH STYLE MAVEN COLIN COWIE

When Colin Cowie isn't busy creating fantasies for others, he's hard at work turning his own life into an art form. But then again, it's never work for Cowie. His personal life and his career are interchangeable. Cowie is an acclaimed celebrity party planner, having designed everything from weddings for Jerry Seinfeld, Don Henley and Lisa Kudrow to a gala for the Whitney Museum, and the author of books on weddings and entertaining. He's now a style guru, with his own television show on the Romance Classics network. The name of his program, *Everyday Elegance with Colin Cowie*, says it all.

So when Cowie walked into an antiquated wreck of an apartment in a landmark building on Manhattan's Upper East Side, he didn't flinch. And when he learned that the apartment next to it was also available and in the same condition, he took that one too. What Cowie found was doors boarded up, decades of enamel paint,

floors several different colors and gas pipes sticking out of walls, to name a few aesthetic monstrosities. "I walked in and saw beyond all that," he recalls. "In my head I was already having dinner parties. It was really like designing another party."

With the help of interior designer Charles Allem, Cowie has created a twelve-

"My home is always busy—it's a complete personification of my business," says celebrity party planner Colin Cowie (right). With interior designer Charles Allem, Cowie joined together and renovated two New York City apartments to serve as his residence and office.



LEFT: The living room features a Russian Cubist study, an Art Déco low table and gilt torchères. **RIGHT:** Walls painted with liquid copper leaf and black-lacquered moldings lend drama to the entrance hall and the vestibule, beyond. The bench is from Julia Gray. Stark carpet.





room Art Déco-inspired se-
raglio. Incredibly enough,
and this will be extremely
frustrating news for Manhat-
tanites undergoing signifi-
cant apartment renovations,
it took only five months to
complete. "I'm a producer,"
explains Cowie. "I produce
parties, books and television;
to me this was another pro-
duction. The contractors were
my production team. I sup-
plied them with drinks and
beer, tipped them handsomely
and created a camaraderie."

Allem, who grew up with
Cowie in South Africa and
has collaborated with him on
several design projects, was
on the same wavelength.
"Like Colin, I like to get the
job done, which is why we
work so well together. It's a
luxury for people to hire a
designer, and it should be en-
joyable for them."

Cowie wanted an apart-
ment that would be large
enough to accommodate a
wing for his office and staff
and another wing for living.
On average he hosts four
dinner parties a week, so his
first priority was that the
apartment be conducive to
entertaining. That required
creating a flow from the en-
trance hall to the living room
to the dining room.

The living room originally
had no access to the dining
room, so an opening was fash-
ioned with a set of double
French doors with mirrored
insets. The same decorative
treatment was used on the
doors leading to the entrance
hall. "When I have a party,"
says Cowie, "everything opens
up, and there's a great sense
of space. I can have a cocktail

A Bjorn Rye painting, one of three,
set the tone for the living room.
"Then we found the Savonnerie
rug," says Allem. "It really validat-
ed the room." Egyptian-style French
Déco vases from Bernd Goeckler.
Steinway grand piano. Clarence
House print on chairs. Stark carpet.

"I love to have a change of energy and pace from room to room," says Allem. THIS PAGE: Settings designed by Cowie highlight the dining room. The 1950s chandelier is Viennese. OPPOSITE: A 1930s desk and a 1940s-style cocktail cart occupy Cowie's office. His television series *Everyday Elegance with Colin Cowie* begins its third season in October.









reception for two hundred.” For the décor, Cowie wanted to evoke the feeling of the Déco period not only through furniture but also in terms of mood. The living room conjures up an image of drop-dead-attractive people sipping martinis while a piano player serenades them with Cole Porter tunes. “I wanted something that was sexy and yet sophisticated,” Cowie notes. Allem suggested tones of cognac and burnt orange set against ebony floors, black-lacquered moldings and black wood blinds. The vibrant colors sprang from a trio of Bjorn Rye paintings that were originally in Allem’s collection. “Normally, I start an interior with a rug,” says Allem. “But in this case, the 1931 Savonnerie was the last item found. It came out of a ballroom in Paris and had

“I like color,” says Allem. “I’m not afraid to push the envelope.” LEFT: A Matisse drawing and two works by Bettina Warner hang in the sitting room. Velvet on the gilt-framed suite is from Old World Weavers, as is the drapery taffeta. Baccarat champagne flutes.

Cowie’s goal was for the apartment to be “glamorous and Old World but edgy at the same time,” he says. ABOVE: Rich textures and colors unify the master bedroom. The 1940s mirrored screen is French. The tufted velvet headboard wall conceals a window. Baccarat vase.

been cut down. I think it gives the room great integrity.”

The Déco-style Italian sofa is covered in cognac-hued velvet. Allem and Cowie have no fear of bright color, and both claim orange as their favorite. The slipper chairs were upholstered in a bold orange-and-black botanical fabric. For the windows, blocks of raw silk in solid cognac and sienna were stitched together. The rest of the furniture is a combination of pieces from the 1920s through the 1950s. Allem broke up the Art Déco theme by hanging nineteenth-century chinoiserie panels. “Chinese furniture and accessories work wonderfully with Déco,” he says.

Cowie’s spacious entrance hall serves as more than just a place for receiving his guests.

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He uses it for entertaining and has even held a seated dinner for fifty there. The 1930s Italian alabaster chandeliers complement those in the living room. Another Bjorn Rye painting in the same rust tones dominates a wall. The choice of copper walls came about by accident. "I was in an art store," Cowie remembers, "and I saw a small swatch of copper foil. I asked the salesperson for nineteen gallons. He said, 'Are you crazy? It's liquid copper leaf, and it comes in two-ounce jars.' I found the manufacturer and ordered it by the gallon." Much to Cowie's delight, it's begun to oxidize and has taken on a rich patina.

Allem was so enthusiastic about the copper leaf that he suggested they carry the color through to the dining room. The 1930s Chinese rug, in shades of rust, jade, peach and teal, was the inspiration behind the fabric choice. Parsons chairs are upholstered in olive-green velvet. The draperies are the same as in the living room, only this time sienna is paired with teal silk. The ebony table expands from fifty-four inches round to a large oval and can seat twelve. Because the space opens up to the living room and the entrance hall, it's also perfect for buffets.

Anyone who likes to entertain would be happy to have two dining options,

to greens and to red. Orange and red is a great combination." But color, Allem advises, should be anchored with wonderful pieces of furniture and art. For the sitting room, the designer found a suite from the *Normandie*, which he covered in rouge velvet that has the feel and texture of mohair. The focal point of the space is a 1920s English cocktail cabinet. "I found it by accident," says Cowie. "The room was already finished, and I bought it sight unseen."

In the master bedroom, Cowie chose olive-green velvet for the upholstered pieces. The floor-to-ceiling tufted headboard lends more than a hint of drama to the room: It also blocks out a window that Cowie thought had a less than stellar view. The fireplace, which hadn't been used in decades, was put back into commission and received a black-lacquered mantel like the one in the living room. With its streamlined furniture and obvious masculine approach, the room is at once seductive and inviting.

Cowie's office is as dramatic as its occupant. The 1930s desk, the 1940s-style cocktail cart and the circa 1920 mirrored low table could easily have stepped out of a Cedric Gibbons movie set. The chocolate-brown walls and the shaved-broadtail-type fabric on the chairs give the room an air of period Hollywood glam-

"I produce parties, books and television; to me this was another production."

but the dining room is Cowie's stage. "I don't set a table, I dress it. I have a square that fits on top of the dining table, which gets covered with a velvet cloth in cognac. I also have a silver mirrored top and a copper mirrored one. Guests never get the same thing twice."

A sitting room was created for pre-dinner drinks and after-dinner entertaining. The only cognac found in this room would be in a brandy snifter. Instead, there are hues of ruby red and burgundy. Allem views the transition of color as a seamless one. "For apartments I like to formulate one color to set the palette for the entire space. By using the same tones, you get an embryo effect that makes people feel secure. Colin's apartment goes from cognacs to oranges

our. "I always thought Déco furniture was perfect if you wanted to create a beautiful, elegant space," he says. "My previous homes weren't right for this kind of furniture. When I moved here, I thought this was the chance to fulfill that fantasy."

In the parties and weddings he creates, Cowie believes it's his responsibility to take people on a fantasy journey. And although he'd like to design for films one day, the spaces he transforms for clients and the rooms he's created for himself are hardly stage sets. "It's one thing to design these spaces, but the most important thing is to imbue them with life. My home is a celebration of life." And with that, Colin Cowie, brimming with enthusiasm and an air of confidence, is off to design another party. □

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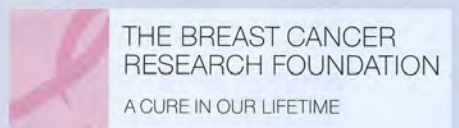
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