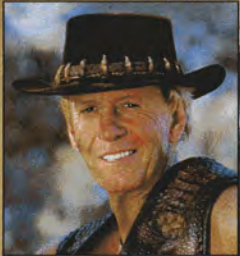


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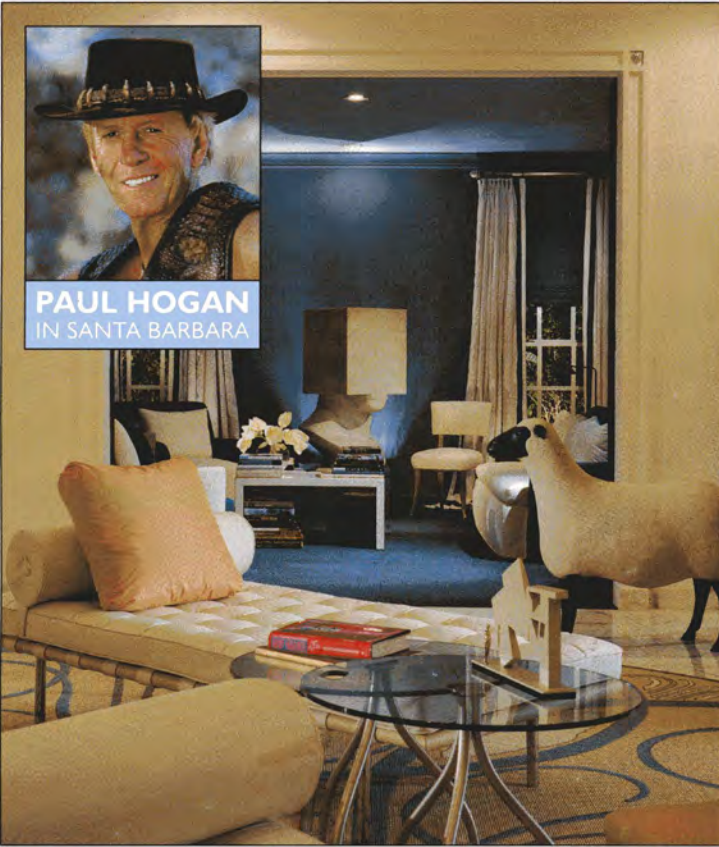
THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF INTERIOR DESIGN

SEPTEMBER 2001

## INTERIOR DESIGNERS' OWN HOMES!



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# Charles Allem

A FEEL FOR TWENTIETH-CENTURY  
STYLE AND GLAMOUR MARKS HIS  
NEW YORK CITY APARTMENT

Text by Steven M. L. Aronson  
Photography by Michael Moran

"I wanted the space to have a sophisticated and restrained flow," designer Charles Allem (left) says of his Fifth Avenue apartment. **BELOW:** In the living room and elsewhere, Allem contrasted rich, soft colors and textures, such as the chocolate velvet of the sofa, with gleaming surfaces and abstract art.

**OPPOSITE:** Allem's selection of furnishings spans nearly every decade of the 20th century. In the living room, a 1996 photograph by James Welling is above a 1930s Tommi Parzinger black-lacquered nickel cabinet. The black-and-white alabaster lamp is from Karl Kemp & Associates. Stark carpet.







"The ceilings are somewhat low, so I installed mirror screens to create depth and open up the space," the designer says, explaining his use of reflective surfaces, including a 1960s faceted mirror at one end of the living room. The lacquered Art Deco armchair is from Ritter Antik.



ABOVE RIGHT: The sheen of the dining area's black-granite floor, brown-lacquered walls and stainless-steel table creates soft patterns on the ceiling, adding to the theme of reflectiveness. The photograph is an untitled 1988 work by Adam Fuss. Baccarat glasses.



I was blessed with an eye by the man above," says designer Charles Allem. He began putting that divine gift to use at a preternaturally early age: When he was only fourteen, he assisted David Hicks in decorating his parents' place in Johannesburg. "My mother commanded him, 'Work with my son,'" Allem owns up.

Four years later, with the likes of Hicks out of the picture, he was free to refurbish his family's South African country house all by himself,

filling it with French and English antiques. Soon afterward, backed by those indispensable parents, he opened a Johannesburg gallery and furniture showroom, with a design office upstairs.

In 1994 Allem set up shop, so to speak, in New York, opening an office on the Upper East Side. Where setting up house was concerned, he opted for "something great and small" in a nondescript modern building in the same neighborhood—a 1,700-square-foot

two-bedroom apartment with a bird's-eye view of the city's supreme greensward, Central Park. When he decided that he could no longer abide the din from Fifth Avenue, he moved to an apartment the same size in the back of the building that not only was quieter but sweetened a sidelong sliver of familiar park view with a sweep of cityscape so great he feels perfectly comfortable stating, "All I have to do to have New York in a nutshell is look out the window."



“The apartment’s design is very severe, and trays of green grass were more appropriate than flowers.” The bookshelves in the library area hold untitled photographs of New York scenes. Steel furniture includes a swiveling House of Jansen low table and a 1970s bench. Stark carpet.

"I wanted to turn the apartment into a kind of deluxe hotel suite, since I love hotels more than anything."



The designer combined the two bedrooms and knocked down other extraneous walls in the service of making the space more fluid and functional. "I wanted to turn the apartment into a kind of deluxe hotel suite," he explains, "since I happen to love hotels more than anything." But while it was the hotel atmosphere that he was determined to reserve for himself, it was actual hotel rooms that he was planning to reserve for out-of-town friends. "I don't much like having people to stay," he declares. "And anyway, there are plenty of hotels nearby, most of which I can see from my bedroom: the Pierre, the Plaza, the Sherry-Netherland . . . whatever gets my friends going—and not staying. I'm even happy to pick up the tab."

Designing for oneself, Al-

lem insists, is "never easy, especially if you're me, because I like so many different periods. Designing for other people is much simpler: I don't get as caught up in the whole creativity aspect of it at the expense of efficiency—I just deliver the product, which in my profession is finished interiors." Asked to list those affinities of his, he replies, "I love the twenties and I love the thirties. I love the forties, too. And the sixties. And the seventies, eighties and nineties. And did I say how much I like the fifties? Really, practically every period of the twentieth century appeals to me. Decorating is a lot like dance: Before you can do contemporary, you have to be grounded in the classics. Fortunately, I was trained in the traditional—I had the last of a colonial upbringing."

Sitting on the polished black-granite floor of the entrance hall/dining area is a round, polished stainless-steel dining table, which, in a reversal of the usual process, Allem had asked one of his clients—the party planner, style guru and television personality Colin Cowie—to design for him. The impression it leaves is sheen on sheen. Overhead Allem installed a stainless-steel pin spotlight—that its reflections create a sort of hologram that plays on the abstract shapes of the Adam Fuss photogram on the wall is just one of those "happy accidents," he maintains.

A panel of black velvet drapery, while not wholly separating the chocolate-lacquered entrance hall from the white-walled living room beyond, gives the illusion of

*continued on page 292*



**ABOVE RIGHT:** "The bedroom was designed to have the feeling of a full suite—self-contained, private and luxurious." Rich textures include cashmere draperies, Pratesi bed linens and a Frette cashmere blanket. Floor lamp, Karl Kemp. Edelman Leather sofa and chaise pillows.

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