

# NEW YORK SPACES

THE HOME DESIGN MAGAZINE OF METROPOLITAN NEW YORK



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INTERIOR DESIGN BY CHARLES ALLEM

TEXT BY CATHERINE WARREN LEONE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIM LEE

# PICTURE PERFECT

in black - and - white

Miami designer Charles Allem goes graphic in a Manhattan flat

ANY LOVER OF FILM NOIR KNOWS BLACK-AND-WHITE CAN deliver as much dramatic punch as a reel of Technicolor—or more. And as Miami-based designer Charles Allem sees it, “We all have our movie.” So for his Manhattan pied-à-terre’s latest incarnation, Allem drew upon old-school black-and-white highlighted by shades of gunmetal gray for graphic glamour.

Allem, who was introduced to decorating in his native South Africa by the English designer David Hicks, is as fond of the absence of color as he is of color. In either case, he takes a minimalist’s approach. “I love harmony in a project,” he says. So whether it’s tones of red or black-and-white, he focuses on one or two hues. “It makes a room explosive but at the same time keeps everything connected,” he says.

Over the years, the décor of Allem’s 1,700-square-foot one-bedroom apartment, located in a ’70s-era building on upper Fifth Avenue, has changed often. “Surroundings should never be stagnant but should grow with you,” he says. “Besides, I like to experiment.”

In the beginning, the space had two bedrooms side by side; now it’s one large room. “I love a big one-bedroom apartment—I’m not in favor of guests,” he says. When out-of-town friends and family do visit, he adds, “there are wonderful hotels nearby.” In fact, Allem designed the enlarged master suite to mimic a self-sufficient hotel suite, with a TV lounge area and a desk.

**Charles Allem’s black-and-white New York pied-à-terre features a vintage Karl Springer dining table and custom cubes for seating. Screens from the 1960s add more visual impact.**

CONTINUED



Prior to its recent black-and-white transformation, the apartment's color scheme fused chocolate brown and black with touches of white. The latter shows up often in the interiors Allem designs for clients. "A vast shot of white is so important," he says. "It brings light and presence into any interior."

All the apartment's walls are painted in wide horizontal stripes of black and white. The furnishings are black and white as well, encompassing a number of design periods. Allem's decorating philosophy centers on the ability to choose pieces wisely. "Today such a deluge of product confronts us all, so it's important to know how to edit," he says. "It's not about how much but about what you select."

The black sisal-covered floor of the L-shaped dining and living room unifies the space. Vintage pieces from the 1950s and '60s are used sparingly. A simple white clock designed by Tommy Parzinger hangs in the entry. The vintage Karl Springer dining table is surrounded by ottomans rather than dining chairs. "You can play cards or read there," he notes. "The ottomans take away the formality and make the space work for today's living." The living area has a kidney-shaped table of polished stainless steel and a pair of Vladimir Kagan-inspired white leather sofas, which are positioned away from the walls—an airy arrangement that allows Allem and his guests ample space to circulate. As the designer says, "There's no dead end."

The galley kitchen works for cocktail parties. Says Allem, who is perfectly attuned to his own inner film: "It's fabulous for that—like a New York movie—then it's out to dinner." □

**Hand-painted horizontal stripes run throughout the apartment, including the office, above. Kidney-shaped couches in the living area, top right, add an airy feeling. Meanwhile, in the bedroom, bottom right, a custom bed, linens and light fixtures are topped with ceramic artwork by Joseph Conforti.**



A black-and-white color scheme “makes a room explosive but at the same time keeps everything connected,” the designer says.

