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ELLE DECOR



ROMANCE LANGUAGE

A high-powered couple get the home of their dreams—and a love story comes full circle—in a historic Charles Platt building on Manhattan's Upper East Side

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The double-height living room of Linda Gottlieb and Robert Tessler's Upper East Side duplex, which was renovated by Lichten Craig Architects and decorated by Ellen Hamilton; the wrought-iron chandelier is early-19th-century Spanish. Facing page: The sofa, by Hamilton Design Associates, is upholstered in Metropolitan cotton-mohair velvet by Brunschwig & Fils. Study for a Portrait of John Edwards, 1986 lithograph by Francis Bacon, and a landscape painting by Sally Michel flank the doorway.

Long before modern-day bankers and lawyers—and high-end fashion boutiques—started overrunning such Manhattan artists' haunts as SoHo and Tribeca, the haute bourgeoisie was busy co-opting the lifestyles, and real estate, of artists. In fact, many of the city's grand turn-of-the-20th-century "artist's studio" buildings, with their double-height living rooms, walls of windows, and plentiful natural light were erected not for painters but for their clients, who envied the space and light and freedom (not to mention the tinge of decadence) of a bohemian way of life.

Then, as now, these apartments were among the most sought after in New York, and none more so than the Studio Building, Charles A. Platt's 1906 Italian Renaissance-style masterpiece on the Upper East Side. Platt, who was renowned for his spatial innovations within traditional forms, occupied a flat in the Studio Building, but many of the others were sold to wealthy collectors who found the rooms ideal for entertaining and for displaying their artwork, archaeological finds, natural wonders, and exotic curiosities.

So it seems fitting that one of these apartments should now be home to television and movie producer Linda Gottlieb and her husband, Robert Tessler, a litigator. The couple have filled their 4,000-square-foot duplex with collections as eclectic as that of the most voracious early-20th-century aesthetes, including Renaissance furniture, miniature Indian paintings, Congolese textiles, Native American artifacts, and contemporary art. But creating unity from this kind of diversity is perhaps more difficult at the beginning of this century than it was at the beginning of the last. "The challenge," says Gottlieb, "was to make the place both elegant and cozy." And cozy isn't a word often applied to rooms with 20-foot ceilings.

That task fell to Ellen Hamilton, a Brooklyn, New York, decorator whose work Tessler and Gottlieb had admired at a friend's place. "Everything we own is strong, simple, and primitive," says Gottlieb. "I told Ellen I wanted this place to look like the country home of an Italian family that had lost all its money."

To begin, Hamilton turned to the Renaissance for inspiration, just as Pratt had, but in her case to the frescoes of Fra Angelico, adapting his dusky roses, gray-blues, vibrant reds and golds to devise a palette that was at once restrained and comforting. She then brought in architects Kevin Lichten and Joan Craig of Lichten Craig, who started by broadening the doorways and adding a small balcony flanked by Florentine-style windows overlooking the living room. Next, Hamilton covered the walls in Venetian plaster by Orazio De Gennaro in a combination of raw sienna and white for a faint-pink glow that constantly changes in the light from the room's enormous handblown-glass window.

The living room remains grand, even vaguely ecclesiastical with its touches of gold (a gold line that runs around the high-gloss red library evokes both Italian primitive paintings and the detailing on a sports car),





A Congolese wedding wrap is mounted above a mid-19th-century Tibetan chest in a corner of the living room; the wing chairs are covered in Fortuny fabric. An 18th-century cabinet is tucked into an alcove by the window; the large antique rug was bought at auction.



In the library, a Coco sofa by Jonas Upholstery is covered in Pierre Frey's Soho Marbre fabric; the antique black-lacquer tray table is from Waldo's Designs. Mid-19th-century French chairs, with original leather upholstery and gilt-embossed relief, are arranged around a games table by Hamilton Design Associates. The rug is by Odegard, and the walls are painted Schreuder's Carriage Red.



The dining room walls are covered in Floribunda crewel from Old World Weavers; the chandelier is by Dennis & Leen from Holly Hunt. Facing page, from top: Lichten Craig designed the kitchen's oak-and-copper cabinets; the range is by Viking. In the upstairs sitting room, the sofa is upholstered in Parioli fabric by Designers Guild from Osborne & Little; the Royère-style cocktail table is by Carole Gratale.









Facing page: The master bedroom's hand-painted wall covering is by Elizabeth Dow; the Corda Venetian-glass table lamps are by Donghia, and the stools are upholstered in Majorca cotton-silk by J. Robert Scott. This page, top right: The cabinets and mirrors in Gottlieb's bathroom were designed by Lichten Craig; the Venetian-plaster walls are by Orazio De Gennaro Studio.



and wrought-iron light fixtures (amazingly, the huge early-19th-century Spanish chandelier was found just a few blocks away, at an antiques shop on East 59th Street). It is a wonderful space for entertaining, which Tessler and Gottlieb do often, yet it never seems overly formal. The size is offset by an array of textures—stenciled velvets, tapestry pillows, and coarse linens—and the cushy seating that invites curling up.

"Dealing with the scale of the room was the hardest thing," says Hamilton. To lift the eye she had the beams of the ceiling painted in faux bois, the spaces between them painted terra verde. She designed a tall wing chair for either side of the mantelpiece and covered them in a pale-blue Fortuny fabric, keeping the pedigree Italian but updating the era. "I always think of Lily Tomlin as Edith Ann when I see those chairs," she adds with a laugh.

Upstairs, the master bedroom suite is more contemporary and more intimate. The view of the verdigris-copper roof of the church next door inspired the pale greens and grays of the master bedroom and the sitting room. Meanwhile, the bathrooms are downright sybaritic—hers is lavender, enlivened with a plethora of mirrors; his, a masculine dark wood. "The secret to a good marriage," says Tessler, "is one bed, two baths."

He should know. The apartment is home to a love story that would make not only Platt contemporary Edith Wharton proud but also Gottlieb, who produced *Dirty Dancing*, that modern ode to romantic love. Hanging in the upstairs hall is a valentine that Tessler drew for Gottlieb when he was 14 and she 13. Childhood sweethearts, the couple reunited in 1991 after 28 years apart, during which they were both married to others. And just as this place has returned to its original inspiration, so have its owners. ■