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METROPOLITAN HOME 1981 2001
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WESTSIDESTORY

BUILT AS A RESIDENTIAL HOTEL FOR PROHIBITION ERA HIGHROLLERS, THE MAJESTIC IS NOW HOME TO ALL SORTS OF NEW YORKERS—INCLUDING A YOUNG FAMILY WHO PROVE THAT CHILDREN AND SOPHISTICATION ARE NOT INCOMPATIBLE.



THE Majestic—a black-and-silver ode to art deco—is one of those sleek, sophisticated New York buildings that catches the eye even from a taxi careening along Central Park West. Originally a hotel, completed in 1931 by architect Irwin S. Chanin, the Majestic offered high living to smooth characters during rough times: Gangster Lucky Luciano called it home, and wise guy Meyer Lansky was shot in its stylish lobby. But times change. Seventy years later, after a 12-month search, architect Paul S. Gleicher's clients decided it was the perfect venue for raising a family.

"We looked for apartments with an architect because we wanted to figure in renovation costs right away," says the practical young mother of two. They had seen many apartments before this one, but were immediately impressed by the details "someone else had been fond of." There were problems: "It's light and airy now," the owner relates, "however, it was dark and closed-in when we first saw it."

"An apartment in this building was meant for a different lifestyle," Gleicher adds. "There was a maid's room, a far-off kitchen, and formal dining and living rooms. There was no family area and certainly no place to play."

To make the apartment more family-friendly (brighter, more open), Gleicher sanded the black walnut floors, put in new windows and in-wall air units. "We widened doorways and installed lighting," he explains, but they respected Chanin-designed details: Hinges that look like little martini shakers were replated, and gorgeous 1930s bathroom and kitchen tiles were cleaned. Adds the client: "We kept the classic Majestic flavor, but made this place suit contemporary family life."

Subtle but bold patterns bring life to the living room: Architect Paul Gleicher designed the window seat; the screen by Andrew Tye for Troy is wedge wood and acrylic; the coffee table is vintage Robjohns-Gibblings.

PRODUCED BY LINDA O'KEEFFE. PHOTOS BY WILLIAM A. BOYD JR.
WRITTEN BY KATHERINE WHITESIDE.





After the dusty work was finished, the architect and his clients called Paul Siskin of Siskin-Valls to tackle the interior design. (Because there was another Paul on the job, installing wiring, it became a theme.) Siskin and his assistant Rodney Lawrence were inspired by the cool elegance of the Majestic, but they were given a clear mandate by their clients: Everything had to be impervious to two little boys and two big cats.

"When you have a building like this, the urge to go all art deco is strong," says Siskin. "But we knew that being relentless about the period would make living here seem like a 2,500-square-foot time warp. The clients wanted a family place, which meant that we could look for a piece of this and a piece of that to give the rooms vitality. I love to give my clients what they want and then throw in unique little things."

Six months of decorating began with upholstery "because it takes longer." The living room sofa is covered in a densely

textured Clarence House fabric that accentuates the open swirls on the eggplant-and-cream Darius carpet. The look is sophisticated and no-nonsense, but across the way is a fat little vintage love seat with contrasting piping that looks as sweet as a chubby toddler decked out in his first suit. A groovy three-layered coffee table by Robjohn-Gibblings (a piece, Siskin says, that required some client convincing) balances a formal baby grand that one of the youngsters plays.

Sconces by Jean Karajian, contemporary reproductions of 1900s French fixtures, light up the long wall between Andrew Tye's geometric screen for Troy and the huge window. A 1960s wire table and a squiggle of glass candlesticks add dancing lines to the light and exuberant mix.

Left: The curvy glass candelabra from Skyscraper echoes the open swirls of the carpet. Above left: The 1960s wire side table serves a chubby vintage love seat, its curves outlined in piping. Above right: Lorin Marsh side chairs flank a table covered in a zebra print from Old World Weavers.

With the living room jazzed up, the entry began to look a little too plain vanilla. But then a pillow cover from the sofa inspired a pattern for Venetian stucco, so Siskin hired Celeste Coughlin to create her hallmark Venetian stucco walls (a process of multiple wet-plaster layers). Once the plaster has set, it is waxed, with some of the shapes buffed to different degrees of shininess. The colors in the plaster are translucent, so you can see the overlap in the final result.

Another challenge was transforming the formerly formal dining room into a family space that could morph back into a dining room. Paul the designer, Paul the architect and Paul the electrician got together: The first designed a table only 54 inches in diameter that magically unfolds to seat at least 12, depending upon how many high chairs are involved. "Paul two" and "Paul three" designed and executed a built-in television-and-music system that keeps everything out of the way when everyone thunders through to the kitchen.

The boys' rooms have been designed to allow a maximum amount of play space, but the master bedroom is a quiet getaway. A huge blond wood armoire delivers storage space that tiny closets don't. Siskin comments that "these rooms are so large that I looked beyond my favorite city shops for places that stock outsize items. This enormous thing came from a warehouse in Queens."

Sleek wood and textured fabrics give this sophisticated apartment a polish that suits its deco setting. "But make no mistake," says the owner, "last Thanksgiving we had 100 grown-ups and kids here to watch the Macy's parade. Yes, it's the Majestic—but times change, and we live here now." ■
See Resources, last pages.

In the master bedroom (opposite): A vintage floor lamp stands next to an armchair and ottoman by Vladimir Kagan. Right, top: A chest designed by Gilbert Rohde in the 1940s stands in the stuccoed entry. Right, bottom: Another Rohde chest sits by the bed, which is dressed in antique textiles.



