

EAST COAST HOME + DESIGN

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Interior Designer Robin McGarry infuses art into a Manhattan apartment. Architect George Dumitru creates balance in a contemporary tutor. Our Designers share their inspirations on our annual Interior Design feature.

A PASSAGE TO INDIA

Interior Designer Robin McGarry relies on a client's rich cultural heritage & love of art to create a dynamic space in the heart of Manhattan

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The rich colors of the painting serves as the perfect contrast to the neutral mohair in the chair and sofa.



A sample of the breathtaking personal art that inspired McGarry's work in the apartment.



When Robin McGarry was called upon to redecorate two rooms in her client's New York luxury apartment, she already went into the project with a few advantages. Her client, a married couple with three children, had worked with Robin previously on another home in Westport. So that there was a sense of familiarity in how she works. More importantly, they already had picked out art pieces that they wanted to use as a design starting point.

"They were very appreciative of art" she explained. "Which I find fabulously refreshing when a client actually understands the impact of art. Not just in the home but in any space." Most of the art that were selected was in the customer's possession from a previous residence. However, they did purchase additional works as the project progressed.

Each piece were made up of the intense, saturated colors that they deeply loved. As a result, Robin was able take cues for the color scheme directly from the artwork. Which is a good thing, considering that the 4 bedroom space located in Manhattan's posh Upper-Eastside had a rather plain interior.

"The apartment offered a spectacular 360 aerial view of Manhattan," McGarry said. "You can see the East River and



the Hudson. But the apartment itself was white walls and white mini blends when they moved in. It was a very cold feeling and they really wanted to warm up the space.”

Further complicating her task was the fact that the location had a serious lighting problem. The apartment didn’t have any ceiling lights. And the windows, which ran to the ceiling, were only located on the perimeters of the building.

But perhaps the most daunting challenge to the project was the apartment’s cement walls. Because of the difficulty that exists in locating electrical and plumbing systems within that type of structure, she wasn’t allowed by the building owners to cut into the walls in order to install any junction boxes.

McGarry was able to make the space feel more like home but combining woven blinds and drapery panels with sheers on the windows. Because of the limitations on attaching a curtain rod—she had to screw the curtains directly to the ceiling.

In addition, Robin chose a vibrant red and white hand-knotted rug for the living room. She also utilized a lot of beautiful fabrics on the furniture to give the room more character. “The Donghia chairs were finished in mohair,” she explained. “And the sofa was a two-tonal piece where the base was wool mohair with the seat cushions were in a Robert Allen design.”

Robin continued her quest to awaken the home’s potential through fabric in the master bedroom. The bed itself featured woven textiles from Rubelli and Donghia. All the materials reflected the rich reds and gold colors that were highlighted in the artwork throughout the room.

McGarry displayed quite a bit of ingenuity to resolve the apartment’s lighting issues. After examining her alternatives on illuminating the space without disturbing the concrete structure—she settled on adding sconces that actually plugged in as opposed of being built into the wall itself. However, this task proved itself easier said than done.

“I definitely had a hard time finding lighting companies that would custom create a sconce with a chord that plugs in,” she recalled. “I must have spent 2 days calling on the phone with lighting companies.” Luckily, she was able to find a local company that could accommodate her request “Chameleon, which is out of New York, was willing to make them for me. Not only did they actually match the color of the chord to the walls. But they also let me select where the switch goes on each one. They did a wonderful job and I couldn’t have been happier with the results.”

In addition to the sconces, Robin also needed a unique answer for the lighting issue in the master bedroom that would accommodate the height of the furniture.

“In the bedroom, they had a low frame bed and they really needed something tall enough to give them the light that they needed.” Luckily, she was able to track down a lamp that was 50 inches tall.

The assignment was a resounding success with her clients. And Robin believes this was definitely due to the trust and understanding that was built over the two design projects. “After doing their first home, I had a much better feeling of what they liked in terms of materials,” Robin explained. “I definitely knew that they wanted hot and warm colors.”

The fact that clients already had their artwork chosen was also a major plus—as most customers fail to identify just how transformative art can be to a space.

“Idealistically, it could be wonderful if I could convince clients how important artwork is and that we should start with picking out some artwork first. To me, it would help make the room a lot more successful. And just the process of selecting things will be easier. Not that furnishing needs to match the artwork. But the artwork provides an overall inspiration.”

Unfortunately, McGarry estimates that 60 to 70% of clients that she works with are extremely reluctant to make an investment in artwork



The woven fabrics of Rubelli & Donghia works to make the master bedroom a warm and cozy refuge from the world. While the 50-inch lamp provides unexpected lighting coverage.

first. However, she does try to encourage clients to branch out and consider this important component of decorating. In fact, she even passes on names of artists that regularly provide their work on loan to help the client to decide on a piece.

"It's probably the most challenging aspect that I have found in my business to help the client find art that they enjoy. Now, once they do they love it! But it can be difficult to convince them to take that first step".

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