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The warmth in this TriBeCa living room begins with the orange in the antique Oushak rug from Nazmiyal. The color is picked up by Calvin Fabrics' Chia on Baker's Paris Loveseat. Vintage Gilbert Rohde armchairs upholstered in Clarence House's Maasai, Frits Henningsen desk and chair, and coffee table from Wyeth. Pedestal tables by Egg Collective. Curtains made of David Rockwell's Droplets fabric for Jim Thompson and a woven mesh from Calvin Fabrics soften the light. Frazier étagères from Baker. Lightolier chandelier. Benjamin Moore's Cool Breeze on walls and Barely There on ceiling. Painting by Robert Greene, courtesy of the Allan Nederpelt gallery.

A MONOLOGUE IN ONE ACT

Setting: The interior of an apartment in a 1906 red-brick warehouse on the western edge of Manhattan. David Rockwell walks into the living room and sits down in a vintage chair. He's wearing black jeans, a black T-shirt, and black shoes with royal blue socks. He crosses his legs, casually tucks his glasses into the neck of his shirt, and starts talking.

DAVID ROCKWELL

My interest in design began with theater. My mom, who was a vaudeville dancer before I was born, started a community theater on the Jersey Shore. That, to my mind, was glorious—the idea that people could come into an unfinished space, as we did here, and create magic.

Before I started to design this apartment, I thought back to one of my college projects. We had to design a town house, and I invented a back-story because it just didn't make sense to me not to know who the town house was for. I didn't feel capable of designing a place out of thin air. That was really the miracle of theater for me—design and storytelling coming together. I've always loved looking up at buildings in New York and seeing all the windows and imagining all the different stories happening inside of every one.

The story we invented here is about a young couple. He's American, she's Dutch, and they've been living in Amsterdam. He's come here to be the media director of the new downtown Whitney museum. She's just gone into business for herself as a fashion designer. Her specialty is denim.

The notion is that they picked this apartment because they're very casual about the way they entertain. The living room and kitchen are open to each other. They serve food on the island. The rolling table can be moved around. The little tables can become hors d'oeuvres trays, the desk a table for two if they want to have an intimate sit-down dinner.

[Rockwell pauses, brushes his hair off his forehead, sweeps his eyes around the living room.]

There's a great old Bauhaus exercise that architecture students used to do. They were given an object, and they had to write a history of what that object meant. Every object in this room tells its own story. >>



Rockwell's Blanket Yarn and Stitch wallcovering for Maya Romanoff and Jim Thompson's Aurora velvet curtains, with Donghia sheers, make the media room feel like a cocoon. Vintage bookcases from Wyeth stand atop the Summit cabinet by Uhuru. Artistic Frame sectional sofa covered in Elitis fabric. The photograph above the Samsung TV is by Joseph La Piana. Coffee table by Egg Collective. **OPPOSITE:** Hand-painted Haveli tiles from Ann Sacks complement the clean lines of the kitchen's Poggenpohl cabinetry. Glass canopy hood, induction cooktop, and combination microwave wall oven by Jenn-Air. Silstone countertop. Vintage Danish modern barstools from Wyeth.

We began with big gestures. First came the Oushak carpet. It seemed to be in keeping with what the couple would want—it has a sense of history but feels fresh and modern. A lot of things, like the pillows, they would have brought with them. A story has to have layers, so this is a very layered design. If you look at the room carefully, it's quite composed, although we didn't try to match anything. That's one of the things I find most unnatural, the idea of matching this, matching that.

Apartments aren't made all at once. We tried to make it feel like it happened over a period of time, mixing readily accessible things with some extraordinary finds. I know a theater director who says, 'Don't put a hat on a hat.' In that spirit, we didn't put leather on a chesterfield sofa. We covered it in a wild 1950s-style orange mohair. It really makes it feel like the most eccentric, perfect thing.

I'm not interested in arbitrary right and wrong design. I used to have an associate who once said to me, 'That's not a good chair.' I said, 'Really? Do you have the whole list of what's good? Give it to me and I'll circulate it.'
[Rockwell looks at the rug, then the sofas.]

The pattern in the room works in layers. There's pattern on the floor, then there's a neutral band of upholstery, then there's another pattern on the pillows. So it's always pattern, not pattern. Pattern. Not pattern. The reason the chairs work against the carpet: not pattern, pattern. If I were to take this pillow and put it on the carpet, it would be too competitive.

Pattern can emphasize where you want people to look. The vertical pattern of the curtains draws your attention to the height of the room. The curtain rod sits within the architecture. I hate rods hanging in space. It feels too decorated.
[He gets up, walks down a hall flanked with paintings, and enters the bedroom.]



One of the things I love about this wallpaper is that it has a kind of depth. You can't quite tell where the wall begins and ends. In a small room, it's an interesting way to go because it makes the room feel larger. And it has a richness to it that's hard to get. Nobody would automatically say that headboard belongs against this wallpaper. It's pattern-on-pattern, which is always risky. What I like about it is it feels as if the wallpaper is out of focus, and then the headboard is in focus—fuzzy pattern, sharp pattern—kind of like a camera dollying in. And then that image—we thought it could be her as a young girl—appears to float. The whole room has a film-noir feel, with that dark, soft-focus wallpaper and just those warm pools of light by the lamps.

[Gently, he runs a hand across the paper as he walks out of the room and back along the corridor, to her studio.]

This room is in the category of a mystery, because it's so layered. There are many little clues to what

ABOVE: The early-19th-century workbench in the entry, flanked by vintage sconces, “says this apartment is about craftsmanship and curation,” Rockwell explains. Photograph by Bill Jacobson, courtesy of Allan Nederpelt. Madeline Weinrib rug from ABC Carpet & Home. **OPPOSITE:** The bedroom has a “Boho-chic sensibility,” with Jim Thompson's moody Byzance wallpaper and an antique screen upholstered in Madeline Weinrib's Black Remy doubling as a headboard. Leron linens. Photograph by Bill Jacobson, courtesy of Allan Nederpelt.

her interests are. Look at that funky chair in its original fabric. It's like an old friend. Our story is she wove the denim piece that's draped over the back of it. The desk and the office chair came out of an old factory, but in the perfect colors, of course.
[He flicks the back of his hand against a yellow enameled metal rectangle hanging on the wall.]

This is an old retail sign. She's using it as a bulletin board, with magnets. The whole wall beneath it is covered in cork, so it all becomes this huge idea board. The Shaker-style peg rack could hold hanks of yarn. She does her sewing and weaving in here.
[He touches the denim on the chair and then walks out into the media room.]

Since this is their screening room, we wanted to keep it dark—aubergine curtains and a carpet with deep, rich plums. I designed the wallcovering, and it's soft as a blanket and over-stitched with yarn. Textiles are her love, media is his, and here we bring their interests together. That natural-wood console looks like something Nakashima might have done, but it was made by a design collective in Brooklyn. We felt this couple would support young artists.
[He moves to the living room, back where he started.]

The first theater production I worked on was *Crucifer of Blood*, a Sherlock Holmes play with Glenn Close. At the end of the first act, just one beam of light shone on the floor. I was aware it was a storytelling device. You'd have to be here at night for the grand finale. The brightness of the walls recedes and the intensity of the colors comes forward. The light is all from lamps, with that crazy chandelier as the centerpiece. Design is about expressing yourself. Embrace your own idiosyncrasies, what you're passionate about. Don't be afraid to take risks. The thing that's least interesting in design is generic good taste. Make your home really *you*. If it feels that way, you're going to be more creative there.





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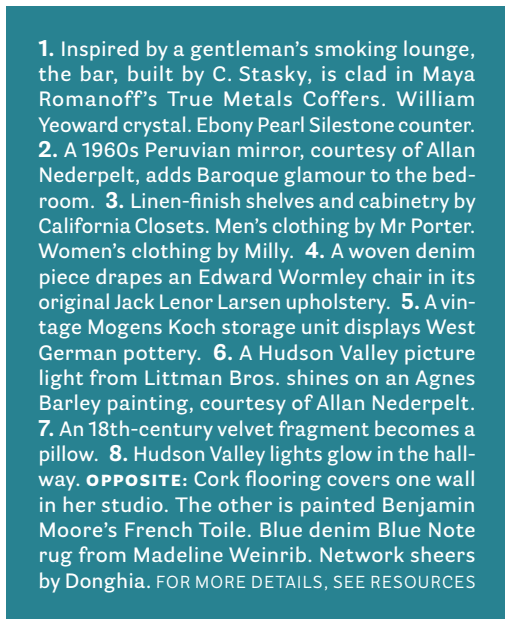
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