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MAC II's Mica Ertegun decorated a couple's 6,000-square-foot penthouse in a midtown Manhattan condominium building by architect Robert A. M. Stern. THESE PAGES: The living room. A pair of Thomas Hart Benton oils—there are four in the room—flank a doorway. Gueridon, Bernd Goeckler Antiques. Fabric on Pollaro Custom Furniture benches, Bergamo. Blue pillow silk, Pollack. Beauvais rug.



Rooms with a View

INSIDE AND OUT, A NEW YORK PENTHOUSE ATTRACTS ATTENTION





The apartment's grand scale is announced in the parchment-paneled entrance gallery (above). Sally Rogers' *Original Sin* sits on the Jacques Quinet center table. Ferdinand Parpan bronze figures stand nearby on Art Déco pedestals. RIGHT: For the dining room, which overlooks Central Park, Ertegün designed macassar ebony dining tables and chairs, both from Pollaro. More Bentons hang above the Edouard Schenck consoles. Edelman chair leather.

It's the top. The top apartment in the top condominium building in Manhattan. A penthouse that refreshes and extends the meaning of the term: a house set on a rooftop terrace (this one with a view of the midtown skyline and, at its feet, the whole geometry of Central Park). Brought to a state approaching perfection by a top-flight architect and a high-end designer working in tandem, it amounts to about as glamorous a pad as can be imagined.

The apartment is a full city block long, occupying the entire top floor of the 20-story park-facing section of Robert A. M. Stern's two-year-old real estate mega-success, 15 Central Park West. Luxuriously clad in a warm gray limestone that "performs beautifully in the New York light," Stern says, the building has attracted a rich cross section and boasts such denizens as Denzel Washington and Sting.

The clients, major philanthropists, bought the space as a raw shell and asked Stern to customize it for them. Then they hired Mica Ertegün of MAC II, whom

the architect is quick to describe as "an inspired professional and a wonderful collaborator." Stern and his partner Roger H. Seifter, who was in charge of the project, and Ertegün and *ber* senior project director, John C. Schaberg, proceeded to lay out the plan of the apartment, making the ceilings as high (13 and a half feet), and the windows as high and wide, as they could. The sweep of space they configured made possible a Versailles-like enfilade of grand rooms with views. From his headquarters directly across the park the client was able to monitor the progress on his apartment with binoculars.

Ertegün selected all the materials and put them to ravishing use: for the entrance gallery, marble floors and parchment panels framed in mahogany; for the library, Brazilian rosewood; for the dining room, Venetian stucco; for the master bedroom, reeded plaster; for the kitchen, Jaguar-green lacquer, bamboo and textured glass; and for the interiors of the fireplaces, long, narrow, 19th-century bricks imported from France.









He was equally hands-on with the fireplaces—how deep he wanted them to be, how wide.

When it came to the baths, the husband took ownership of the onyx, making multiple trips to the stoneyard. “Onyx slabs look ugly mismatched—they make you dizzy,” he maintains, adding with a laugh, “It took two years to do the apartment and three years to get the onyx to match.” He was equally hands-on with the fireplaces—how deep he wanted them to be, how wide. And there was a specific size wood he wished to use. Stern had to enlarge the fireplaces from the building standard to accommodate his client’s over-size logs. “They’re from fallen trees on our property in the country, so it’s God’s pruning that goes into those fireplaces,” the husband stresses.

The couple had had “English traditional forever,” according to the wife, who realized early on that “the scale of this apartment would eat up English furniture.” Ertegün nudged them in the direction of Art Déco. They didn’t have to look any further, really, than the building itself, whose façade and lobby so suavely embody Déco’s simple classicism. “Mica drew us a floor plan, with the sizes of the pieces we would need, and we rushed around Paris to the shops she recommended while she and John were shopping New York,” the husband recounts. The result of that transatlantic frenzy was major pieces by such masters as Ruhlmann, Adnet and Quinet.

The pale-butter living room was created around four richly colored oils by the great Regionalist painter Thomas Hart Benton that depict American historical scenes, beginning with pioneer days, and that the clients wanted hung in chronological order. To enliven the subdued palette, Ertegün borrowed a few hues from

Brazilian rosewood warms the library, which also features an André Sornay octagonal mahogany end table, Jacques Adnet armchairs, a low table by Dominique and an Art Déco-style carpet created specially for the room. The slender fireplace bricks are antique, found in France.



There's an anemometer installed on the roof to measure wind speed so the canvas awnings can be retracted and don't get ripped off.

those Bentons—royal blue for some of the pillows and armchairs and yellow and blue in the hand-painted floral fabric on the sofas and some of the chairs. She tilted the French 1920s round silver mirror above the mantel so that it would catch not merely an immensity of sky but an amplitude of park. “I don’t usually tilt,” she explains. “I would only tilt for a view to die for.”

It was the view that dictated the shape of the master bedroom, which had been on track to be a square. But when the husband pointed out to Stern that from the only place the bed could go you could look straight out but not get the full panorama, the architect sketched an ellipse that would allow the couple to lie in bed and look diagonally across the room to all of the view. The introduction of the ellipse served as well to enrich the enfilade and to conclude it in an interesting way. A ceiling cove was also introduced, and the soft glow emanating from it washes the pale blue-green room—including William Merritt Chase’s *A Lady in Pink*, which, the husband confides, “I picked out because I liked the nape of her neck.”

The designer provided the couple with the ultimate in special effects: “things that even the other haves don’t have,” says Schaberg. There’s an anemometer installed on the roof to measure wind speed so the terraces’ canvas awnings can be retracted and don’t get ripped off Stern’s exalted facade. There are moisture sensors that, detecting a leak, activate the system to send an e-mail to the building managers; and temperature sensors, strapped to pipes, that cause an e-mail to be sent when the temperature deviates by as little as a single degree from what the client has set it at. All this technology is stealth—you don’t see a thing. And for another wonder, the client, who had never before been able to tame technology of any sort, has learned how to make it behave for him here.

Ertegün says, “They were engaged clients, and happily we didn’t have any collisions on taste.” Schaberg for his part sums up, “Like artists, Mica and I started from a blank canvas—we were given the opportunity to create a space exhilaratingly unlike any other.” □



ABOVE: At a full city block in length, the penthouse has multiple terraces, including one devoted to outdoor dining. OPPOSITE: Elliptical reeded-plaster walls in the master bedroom orient the bed toward the view of the park. The painting is by William Merritt Chase. The metal-and-leather armchair is a Marcel Coard. Drapery linen, Bergamo. Beauvais carpet.