

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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Before & After Issue





Before



HOME IMPROVEMENT IN THE CITY

A MANDATE FOR CHANGE IS EMBRACED ON PARK AVENUE

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A couple who moved to a classic prewar co-op on Park Avenue "wanted to live with antiques in a traditional environment," says interior designer Penny Drue Baird. ABOVE: Because the space was "a box, totally lacking in character," says Baird, she worked with designer Irwin Weiner, who "has an enormous knowledge of architectural detail."

When Penny Drue Baird's clients decided that it was time to move, they were living in a modern minimalist apartment on Manhattan's East Side. Their new place, they felt, should have exactly the opposite atmosphere. It should evoke tradition. It should exude elegance. It should be rich with architectural detail and period furnishings.

But since the clients had two children, they also needed space. The apartment they eventually settled on, in a prewar Park Avenue co-op, was certainly large enough. It had four bedrooms, a living room, a dining room, a library, a large kitchen and two maids' rooms. Unfortunately, it was also exceedingly plain.

ABOVE: In the entrance gallery, Baird and Weiner put in French doors to impart the feeling of a central axis. To mask irregular crossbeams, the ceiling was lowered and domes and decorative moldings were added. RIGHT: A painted and stenciled floor completes the formal tone. Beneath the relief-framed mirror is a bench upholstered in Brunschwig & Fils needlepoint fabric.



After



Before

"The apartment had no charm, no detail," Baird says. And that was what her clients asked the designer to provide. "They wanted me to make it look and feel like one of the truly grand Park Avenue apartments."

Baird, working with another Manhattan-based designer, Irwin Weiner, set out not only to add architectural detail but also to make the new detail seem original. "We wanted people who came to the apartment to think that all the touches we added had been there from the beginning," Baird explains.

Each room posed its own challenges. The entrance gallery, for example, had three irregularly spaced



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ABOVE: In the living room, they created an arched doorway for a French wrought-iron gate. "We applied moldings to the walls and the ceiling so they'd look more architectural but not overpowering," explains Weiner.

ABOVE: After repainting, the designers uncovered the Louis XV-style marble mantel Baird brought from France and installed ceiling lights. BELOW: Aubusson tapestry medallions are mounted on mirrored panels. Nicaise de Keyser's *Portrait of a Young Girl with Flowers*, 1874, hangs over the mantel. At right is Antonio de La Gandara's *Portrait of a Woman*, 1885. Fireplace screen and tools, Danny Alessandro.



After



Before

"I think a ceiling is like an exposed canvas," says Weiner. ABOVE: Decorative moldings and a medallion were used to enhance the dining room. Wiring for the sconces that would be above the mantel was put in early on. The doors that originally led into the gallery lean against the far wall.

BELOW: Baird decided to transform a set of 19th-century tapestries she found in Paris into upholstered panels in the dining room. Weiner designed the corner niche and the walnut paneling as well as the chimney brace behind the decorative mantel.



In Progress

beams in the ceiling along with unattractive crown molding that could not be removed because it encased structural elements. Baird and Weiner decided to lower the ceiling, which would enable them to hide the beams and the molding. The clients, however, resisted the idea. Like most New Yorkers, they were horrified by the thought of surrendering any of the space that is at such a premium in the city—even when it was at the top of a room.

"The wife said, 'I bought this apartment because I needed space, and now you're taking it away,'" Baird recalls with a smile. "But they were open to new ideas, and in the end they trusted us."

The clients were able to get back some of that space when Weiner came up with the idea of "baying out the ceiling"—that is, creating two recessed domes in which chandeliers could hang. These fit neatly between the ceiling's original beams.

The ceiling strikes a formal note, one the designers enhanced by adding a plaster crown molding with an eighteenth-century pattern of repeating acanthus leaves. The wood floor makes an even bolder declaration of formality. Baird and Weiner painted over its conventional herringbone pattern with a striking grid of cream-colored diagonal lines. To establish a link between the floor and the ceiling, they added a leaf stencil in the center of each grid square.

The living room required little in the way of architectural renovation. The designers left its ceiling beams exposed, since they were regularly spaced and would provide an interesting visual contrast to the recessed domes of the gallery. But they did refine their stark geometry by placing delicate panel moldings between the beams in each ceiling section.

Most living rooms, even in traditional buildings, either depend on

contemporary recessed lighting or are cluttered with table lamps. Baird and Weiner avoided these conventional solutions by installing a set of ten ceiling fixtures with pale half globes and gilt-metal collars. "This way," Weiner says, "it doesn't look like a lamp store, nor does it look too contemporary."

In the dining room, Baird and Weiner felt they had to make more radical changes. "A dining room can be more theatrical than the other rooms," Weiner says. "And when it is, entertaining becomes much more of an occasion."

Deciding that the room should announce itself with a flourish, they found a massive French iron gate that they placed in the doorway. The designers and clients believed the dining room itself was too long and narrow. To soften its restrictive dimensions, they put in a mantel and built a decorative chimney brace in the center of one wall. They also added corner niches that diminish the sense of tight rectangularity.

What's most striking about the dining room is the set of four nineteenth century tapestries found in Paris. Instead of hanging them on the wall, the designers had them upholstered to a backing, then designed a walnut paneling into which the stretched tapestries would fit.

"The upholstered tapestries do several things," says Baird. "They help break up the room, for one. They keep the paneling from being too oppressive, which is what would happen if it were all wood. And they give the room a feeling of depth and luxury that you wouldn't have if they were simply hanging there."

In the library, Baird and Weiner knocked out a wall to accommodate French doors. They built a powder room, a television stand, a wet bar, file cabinets and closets against one wall, then hid the entire assemblage be-

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"A dining room can be more theatrical than the other rooms. When it is, entertaining becomes much more of an occasion."

OPPOSITE: "What was once a lackluster rectangular room now has charm and texture," says Baird. The dining table, from Devon Shop, is set with Lalique crystal, Scully & Scully china and antique candlesticks from Sotheby's. The marble mantel clock is from Christie's; the Chinese needlepoint carpet is from Stark.



Before



In Progress

"The clients were very pragmatic about function and space," notes Weiner. ABOVE LEFT: Storage cabinets were created for one wall of the library. Nearest the doors is the entrance to the powder room. ABOVE RIGHT: Once the cabinetry was completed, trompe-l'oeil books and accessories were painted on the panels.

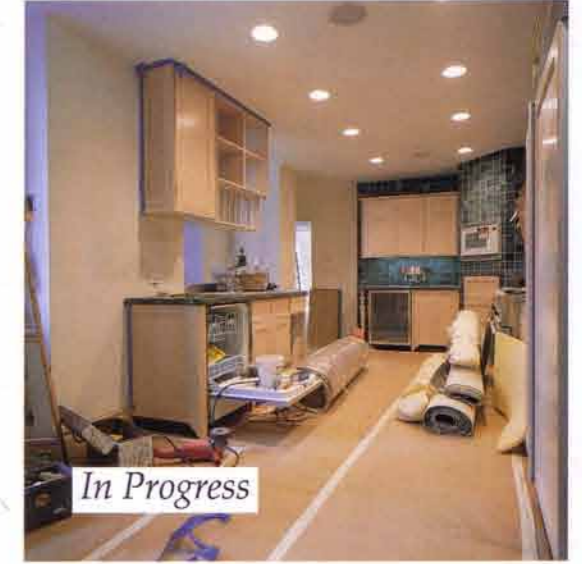
BELOW: "Some of the 'books' have our names on them, or are favorite titles," says the husband. The antique globe is from Sotheby's. Clarence House velvet; Stark carpet.



After



Before



In Progress

ABOVE: "The apartment had a bare-bones kitchen," says Baird. The designers gutted it, turning an adjacent maid's room into a sitting area and installing new cabinetry.

ABOVE RIGHT: The next phase entailed laying the marble-tiled walls and the granite countertops, hooking up the appliances and facing the cabinets. BELOW: "The result has an unfitted look, as though all the elements are freestanding," says Weiner. Prints are from Stephanie Hoppen. Country Floors tumbled-marble tiles.



After



Before



In Progress

Although they had to shrink the bedroom, it was spacious enough not to seem cramped.

ABOVE LEFT: "To enlarge the master bath without minimizing the master bedroom, we moved the door to one end and rounded the edges of the wall," explains Baird. ABOVE RIGHT: The new plaster moldings were given an antique finish, and sconces were added. BELOW: A painting by André Guisson is above the bed. The needlepoint clock is from Stephanie Hoppen. Night tables from Devon Shop.



Before



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After



After

OPPOSITE ABOVE AND OPPOSITE: Along with storage space for clothing and a media center, Weiner designed glazed cabinets for the corner of the master bedroom to disguise an air-conditioning unit.

ABOVE: "One of my requirements was that the bedroom have a place other than the bed to just sit and read a book," says the wife. With the structural changes, the bed can face the windows overlooking Central Park. The chairs and ottoman are covered in a woven fabric from Brunswick & Fils; draperies are Clarence House toile de Jouy; taffeta stripe for underdrape and bed skirt, Cowtan & Tout.

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hind trompe-l'oeil bookcases. To reinforce the illusion, they added mahogany shelf edges beneath each row of painted books.

"What's wonderful about trompe l'oeil is that it enables you to be opulent but at the same time lighthearted," Weiner notes. "You get richness without the stuffiness that so often comes with it."

The master bedroom, located in one of the building's corners, is bright and airy, with windows in two of the walls. Unfortunately, the wall against which the bed ideally should have gone had the door to the bath right in its center. The designers moved the door to one side and expanded the bath, adding a modern shower and tub and a vanity. Although that meant shrinking the bedroom, it was spacious enough not to seem cramped after the encroachment. By making the new wall between the two rooms rounded at the edges, Baird and Weiner created a visual frame for the bed's headboard, which rests against it.

Baird had the freedom of furnishing the apartment almost in its entirety, since the modern furniture from the clients' previous apartment was completely out of place in the new space. "The only things they brought were the piano and a few paintings," says Weiner.

Baird shopped with the clients in Paris to find the French pieces that would establish the atmosphere they wanted. "In a short period we found almost everything the apartment needed, from rugs to chandeliers," she says. For the clients, that trip proved to be the high point of the project. "It was a whirlwind shopping expedition, scouring the Left Bank and the flea markets in search of unique furnishings," says the wife. For Penny Drue Baird, the high point was the postconstruction rush: "It required a lot of coordination, with pieces arriving from Europe, lamps to be wired, paintings to be hung. I called in every favor owed to me to get things delivered, polished and put in place." □