

# Everything Old Is New Again

*New New York Interiors*

EDITED BY ANGELIKA TASCHEN,

TEXT BY PAUL WEBSTER

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**BY HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP**

More than a decade has passed since German editor Angelika Taschen produced her first large volume on New York interiors, and her sequel, *New New York Interiors*, shows what fun an author can have keeping up with the times. In the preface, Taschen writes that the events of 9/11 led the city to be “much less focused on money and the making of it”—perhaps a slightly premature prediction given the recent Wall Street meltdown—and she focuses not on those who made the most money but those who made the most of their living conditions. As a result, *New New York Interiors* is one of the liveliest picture books around. With 39 featured residences, it’s a lesson that creativity trumps cash almost every time.

An art historian by training, Taschen appreciates the bohemian and doesn’t mind a dose of DIY. Her notion of New York is an inventive mélange where Baby Jane Holzer’s Renaissance-revival townhouse full of Warhol paintings is just a few pages away from the Chelsea Hotel apartment of hairdresser Gerald DeCock, who hand-painted his jewel-tone walls and furniture and hung curtains of plastic Mardi Gras beads.

The book offers the voyeuristic thrill of peering into a life usually art-directed out of most design books. Interiors include the personal clutter of their invariably fascinating residents. In the Staten Island home of adult film superstar Vanessa Del Rio, leopard-print furniture and carpets serve as backdrops for her stiletto collection, her curling iron, even her garter belt. In the Harlem townhouse of Cary Leibowitz, director of contemporary editions at Phil-



lips de Pury, an ecstatic collection of contemporary art is hung on walls covered in wildly patterned papers, all of it competing for attention with knickknacks like his Campbell’s soup trashcans.

Predictably, some of the most extraordinary residences belong to artists. If Julian Schnabel weren’t such a fantastic painter and film director, he could be a decorator. His Palazzo Chupi may annoy downtown purists, but the velvet and gilt furniture, pneumatic fireplace mantel, and Venetian colors on the walls—not to mention his better paintings and those of friends—exude exuberance. In his eight-room apartment in the Chelsea Hotel, Philip Taaffe had designer Ricky Clifton help him integrate 19th-century American furniture with fabrics as dedicated to pattern as Taaffe’s seductive abstract paintings.

The book is not all Dionysian delights—many interiors exemplify restraint. Architect Lee Mindel, of Shelton, Mindel & Associates, designed the clean-swept luxury loft in a Richard Meier tower that claims the cover of the book, as well as a penthouse in the Flatiron district with a curving steel stair that winds to a rooftop solarium.

Excellent photographs by François Halard, Pieter Estersohn, Jason Schmidt and others make the case while Paul Webster’s concise, witty text strikes exactly the right tone. If this is the sort of New York we get to see in the current economic downturn, things are looking up.



**Cary Leibowitz's Harlem townhouse features wildly patterned living room walls.**

The villa became something of an obsession for Saladino, who first saw the stone ruin in 1985, acquired it in 2001, and then spent four years rebuilding it and restoring the gardens. A Yale-educated

architect who has designed a number of grand houses, Saladino admits. "It was one of the most all-encompassing projects I have ever undertaken." Like any artist pleased with his work, he wants it to be seen. In the book's sections on architecture, interiors, landscape and entertaining, Saladino shares his own process of discovery and resolution, and includes his renderings of architectural plans on translucent vellum. Some of the gorgeous photographs are infrared, which lends them a moody, spectral quality. Indeed, *Villa* is a publication of such heft and glory that it deserves the exhausted adjective "lavish."

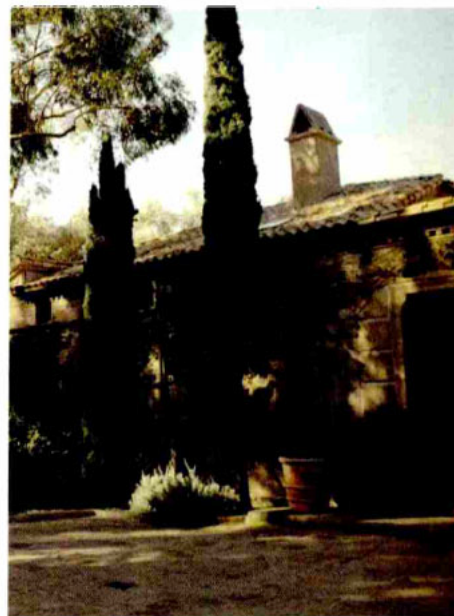
An American of Italian heritage, Saladino says he was viscerally enthralled by the 17th-century Italian-style stone walls and tile roofs. He liked the villa's mix of grandeur and modesty. He decided to respect the house as an antique but to add elements of 21st-century comfort and technology. For the landscaping, he looked to the classically composed paintings of Poussin and Claude Lorrain. Soon, however, he recognized that "[e]very time you reach for a dream, reality can drag you back." Still, he clearly relished the challenge.

Originally built by Wallace Frost, an architect who had spent part of the 1920s in Italy, the villa was a wreck by the time Saladino bought it. He writes a compelling account of closing cracked walls, finding 14,000 antique tiles for the roof

and threading electrical conduits through the load-bearing stone walls (three feet thick at the base and narrowing at the top). It took six men an entire year to sandblast through the peach and coral colors desecrating those exquisitely exposed walls, which are the soul of the villa. Saladino's design decisions never compete or distract from their soothing presence.

The rooms feature exposed beams, carved dark wood furnishings, warm velvet or crisp linen upholstery, muted patterned carpets and vases overflowing with white roses and sage. A Cy Twombly painting hangs in the living room. Even the dining room chandelier is spare and lyrical. Only in Saladino's own bedroom did he give in to what he calls "my most extravagant theatrical inclinations." That can happen if you have a Napoleonic bed.

Betty's bedroom is cozier, and Saladino thoughtfully installed extra heating units under the bathroom floor so that her antique marble bathtub will never be cold. (Sigh!) Each of the three upstairs bedrooms is soothing, quiet, and light. Since I still have not met Saladino or Betty, I must be content with the Primavera bedroom. The tiny former servant's quarters has a rough, angled ceiling with a skylight and, as important, a shelf overflowing with books to be read. Books like *Villa*. Make room, Betty.



**A corner of the Santa Barbara villa's exterior facade is punctuated by Italian cypress trees.**