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CONTENTS



REFRESHER COURSE

Fifteen years after Ellie Cullman first crafted their Park Avenue apartment, a couple bring the designer back to give the place a new lease on life

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Philanthropists Ellen and Daniel Crown share a charged Manhattan life, with four children, four dogs, and an apartment in a storied 1913 building on Park Avenue. Its interior design, by the New York firm of Cullman & Kravis, had served the couple well for more than 15 years. But Ellen eventually found herself wondering, “How can we marry a new, more modern effect with the traditional architecture?” And it became obvious: An update was required.

It wasn’t exactly a joint endeavor, at least not in the beginning. While Ellen was poised to speed ahead, Dan—a producer of independent films and the former chairman of Crown Theatres—didn’t see the need for change. “A home should look like a home first,” he says. To him, this one very much did. His wife, though, is “all about the light, bright space,” as she puts it. Cullman & Kravis founder Ellie Cullman adds: “Ellen is very fashion forward.”

Cullman, who is being honored this month with the Albert Hadley Lifetime Achievement Award from the New York School of Interior Design, worked in tandem with her design partner, Lee Cavanaugh. (The pair also handled the Crowns’ weekend home in Connecticut.) They began this project lightly, switching out fixtures and updating finishes “to make the background younger, sleeker, and more vibrant,” says Cullman. Before too long, what started as a stealth redo had the blessing of both parties to go full tilt.

The apartment opens with a burst of color. A wide-awake shade of orange—on the cushions of a pair of black-lacquer benches and the lamps atop a Napoleon III console—draws out the tawny tone in

LEFT: In the living room of Ellen and Daniel Crown’s Manhattan apartment, which was designed by Ellie Cullman and Lee Cavanaugh of Cullman & Kravis, the custom-made sofa is covered in a Kravet chenille, the armchairs are upholstered in a Rogers & Goffigon fabric, the club chairs are in a leopard print by Taffard Fabrics, and the 1940s cocktail table is attributed to Jacques Quinet; 19th-century Italian mirrors flank a painting by Canan Tolon, the walls are Venetian plaster, the rug is by ABC Carpet & Home, and a 19th-century chandelier hangs from the aluminum-leaf ceiling. **ABOVE:** The entry features custom-made benches covered in a Schumacher fabric, a Napoleon III console, and lanterns by Price Glover, Inc. For details, see Resources.

Ellen and Daniel Crown in their living room; the 19th-century lacquered chest is Japanese, and the curtains are of a fabric by Coraggio. **BELOW:** Chairs by TK Collections surround a custom-made painted glass-topped table in the breakfast area; the silk-screens are by Donald Sultan, and the 1960s light fixture is English.



A Baroque-style Austrian chandelier from Bernd Goeckler Antiques hangs above a circa-1910 English dining table, the antique Japanese chest is from Galerie Pla, the painting above it is by Robert Rauschenberg, and the 1940s console is by Jacques Adnet; the curtains are of a silk by Kravet, the ceiling is finished in gold leaf, and the sisal rug is by ABC Carpet & Home. For details, see Resources.



The custom-made daybed and Art Deco armchair in Ellen's sitting room are covered in a Pierre Frey fabric, the 1960s Italian chandelier is from John Salibello, and the carpet is by Stark; the photograph is by Tim Davis, and the print is by Damien Hirst.



Chairs by Scalamandré, upholstered in a Norbar fabric, flank a 1970s Louis XVI-style commode by Maison Jansen in the master bedroom; a photograph by Robert Mapplethorpe leans against a custom-made gold-lacquered mirror, and the paintings are by Robert Kushner.



The tub and sink in Ellen's bathroom are by Waterworks, with fittings by P.E. Guerin, the custom-made chair is upholstered in a Kravet fabric, and the cabinetry is painted in Benjamin Moore's White Dove.



In Dan's study, the sofa, covered in a Kravet fabric, the nailhead-trimmed armchair, in a Holland & Sherry fabric, and cocktail table are all custom made, the club chair is by Robert Allen, the sculpture is by Eric Fischl, and the carpet is by Beauvais. For details, see Resources



In the master bedroom, the bed, upholstered in a Larsen fabric, and bedside tables are custom designs, the chaise is covered in a Glant fabric, and the chandelier is by Marvin Alexander, Inc.; the photograph is by Candida Höfer, the print is by Damien Hirst, the curtains are of a fabric by Kravet with embroidered trim by Lesage, the walls are covered in a Glant fabric with trim by Passementerie, and the carpet is by Stark. For details, see Resources.

the diamond-patterned marble floor, one that's eminently compatible with the room's bronze sconces and doors of rich mahogany.

By contrast, the living room feels celestially light. Its high-gloss ceiling is a mosaic of platinum-hued squares of parchment. Other surfaces became paler. "We went much more monochromatic with the carpet," says Cavanaugh, who swapped a classic floral needlepoint for sisal. Simple curtains trimmed with jeweled embroideries by the venerable Paris firm of Lesage add to the room's sparkle.

As for the furniture, the designers reused and renewed pieces that were loved. Saber legs on a custom onyx-topped table, for example—which "felt a little too uncool," Cullman says—were replaced by tapered ones. Other metamorphoses came more easily: Placing a pair of golden Art Deco lights atop a 19th-century Japanese chest imbued it with "a real Parisian chic," she adds. "It made it younger and fun."

The new furnishings, including leopard-patterned armchairs of Cavanaugh's design, tend to be amply proportioned and clean-lined. "The Crowns are concerned with comfort," she says. "It's not enough to look good." When the couple fell in love with an ornate, Empire-style chandelier on a shopping trip to Paris, Cullman's enthusiasm was initially muted. The piece is "dark and big," she says, and it wasn't clear it could work in the living room. But it does, centering the room. "Sometimes it's important to break the rules," she admits.

An abstract painting by Canan Tolon, which hangs above the fireplace, was, like the other artworks here, purchased with the aid of art consultant Lorinda Ash. And this is where the renovation proved to be life-changing: "We were inspired by the design to go more modern in art," Dan says. Acquiring contemporary pieces has since become a passion for the couple; their collection now includes works by Eric Fischl and Damien Hirst, among others.

As in the best design, each space seems, however subtly, like an iteration of the rest. "It's very important that everything feels cohesive but that there's change from room to room," Cullman says. In the dining room—a space meant to glow—a gold-leaf ceiling echoes the luminosity of the living room's platinum one. The room's focal point is a standout black-lacquered Japanese cabinet from the Meiji period, with inlaid silver and gold-lacquer medallions.

Early on, Dan deemed his pine-paneled study to be off-limits to any change. "I wanted my den to just be comfortable—more informal," he explains. The genius of Cullman and Cavanaugh's work here is that it fits that description, yet with a few cutting-edge elements spliced in, including a pair of lacquered side tables and a round mirror, all in bright scarlet. They're a fitting reminder of the new, contemporary focus to the Crowns' collecting life, a passion that blazes through their home. ■