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A HIGHLAND
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STRIKING A BALANCE

Tasked with reinventing a conservative Park Avenue apartment, New York-based designer Sandra Nunnerley has created a modern, relaxed space that also works for formal entertaining

TEXT AARON PEASLEY | PHOTOGRAPHS PAUL MASSEY

In a corner of the sitting room, a display of Thomas Demand's *Flare* prints creates a striking effect above the L-shape sofa. An installation of Maren Kloppmann's porcelain wall sculptures hangs next to the doorway



Imagine the traditional Park Avenue apartment and thoughts may turn to gloomy, hidebound residences replete with formal room layouts, heavy curtains and time-worn parquet floors. But stepping into this spectacular apartment designed from top to bottom by Sandra Nunnerley makes you reassess that notion completely. From the hall alone, with its luminous Forties French chandelier, it is immediately clear that this is not your standard Park Avenue renovation.

'We were tasked with completely reinventing the original space, which had a much more conservative layout and character,' says Sandra, who had worked with the owner in the past on a large family house outside New York City. 'Together we envisioned something that would give rise to her ultimate city life: a glamorous loft-like abode that would work with her existing art and also be perfect for entertaining.'

Extensive apartment alterations are never easy in Manhattan, but the owner, a successful commercial real estate developer and philanthropist, found the project smooth from its inception. 'Sandra and I very much understand each other's mindset,' she says. 'She knew that I was looking for something more relaxed, but also a place that would meet multiple requirements. On the one hand, I wanted my adult children to be able to flop on the sofa in their jeans, but it had to be equally suitable for hosting a more formal gathering.'

With this brief in mind, Sandra stripped the apartment back to a skeleton structure and started to create a layout that allowed the rooms to elegantly unfold into each other. She removed most of the interior walls, revealing a plan that established the large sitting room as the apartment's social centre. 'This is really where I spend 80 per cent of my time and where I feel utterly carefree,' says the owner. 'I entertain here and watch television here. It's a place where you can sip Champagne, but not be afraid to put your feet up on the coffee table.'

THIS PAGE At the opposite end of the sitting room is a more formal area, where a pair of Louis XVI gilded armchairs sits in harmony with a late-nineteenth-century studded African chair (bottom). To one side of the chimneypiece is a French Modernist ceramic vase (top). **OPPOSITE** In the dining room, James Casebere's *Green Staircase #3* photograph is framed by the doorway. The plastered chandelier is from Stephen Antonson





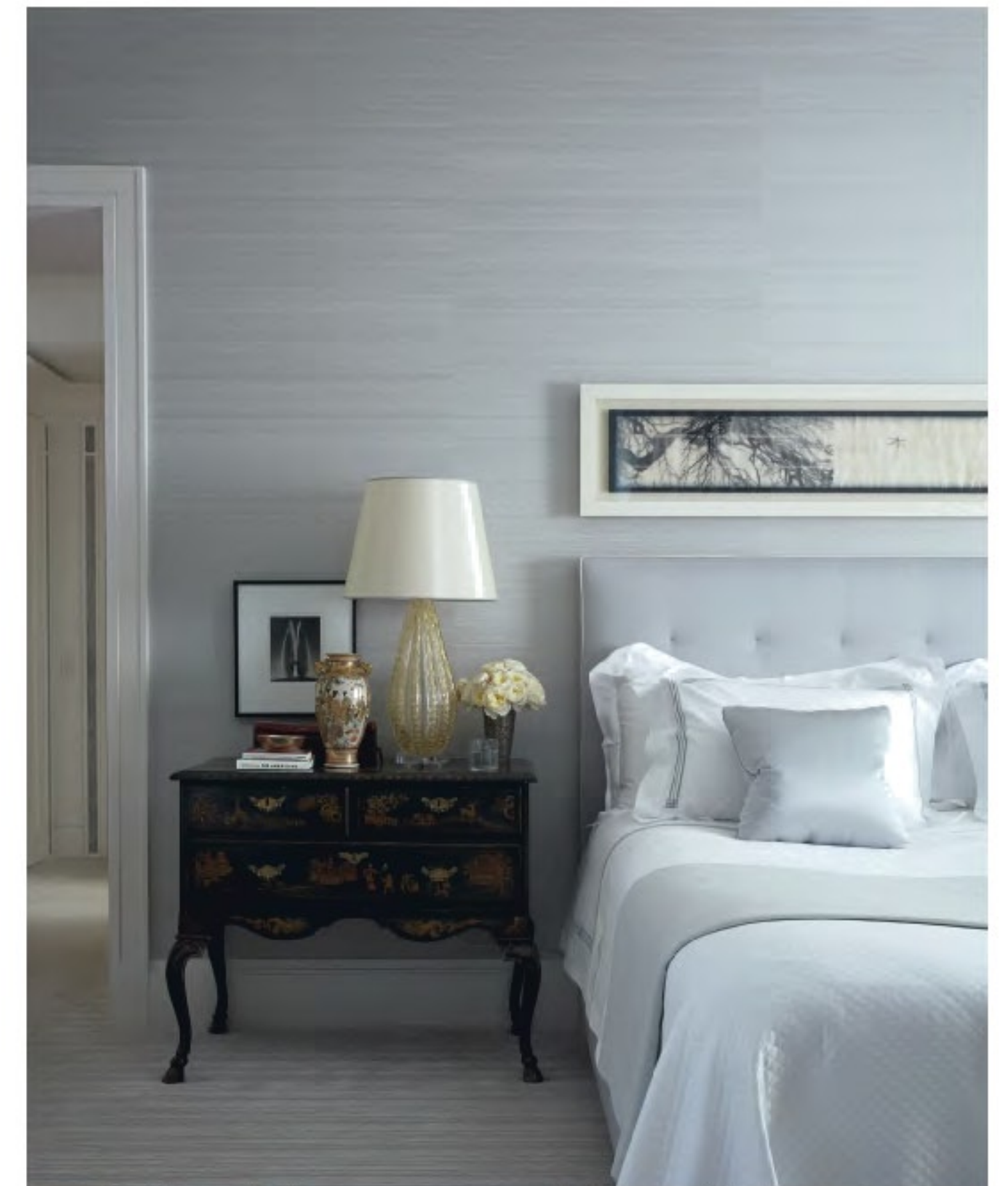
The owner and Sandra were also perfectly matched in their passion for – and knowledge of – art. ‘I have always been fascinated by the cross-section of art and design,’ says New Zealand native Sandra, who worked at the Marlborough Gallery when she first moved to New York decades ago. She has been a well-known member of the city’s art cognoscenti ever since. ‘Sandra has a wonderful eye for art and manages to find the most exquisite pieces you’d least expect,’ says the owner. ‘She was able to advise on the best work for the space, as well as which of my existing pieces would fit.’

One of the apartment’s most striking elements is a corner of the sitting room, in which a series of Thomas Demand’s chromogenic prints have been installed in a grid above a sofa. ‘The thing about living on Park Avenue is you don’t get a lot of sunlight and this feels like a little portal looking out,’ the owner says. ‘My late husband and I used to spend a lot of time in Aspen and this makes me feel as if I’m transported back to its natural beauty.’

Her art collection – much of it contemporary photography, including works by Todd Hido, James Casebere and Christopher Bucklow – beautifully complements furniture by Alexandre Logé and Marc Bankowsky. Sandra describes the result as ‘timeless luxury and refinement’, without sacrificing a sense of modernity. According to the owner, this sense of elevated ease is essential to the way she lives: ‘You want somebody to come into your home and not feel overwhelmed by the furniture and the accessories – they must instantly feel in balance.’

Another of the designer’s signatures, which can be found in many of her projects, is her masterful use of fabrics and textures. The walls in the hall are in sumptuous leather; the sitting room walls have been covered in fine Irish linen (ideal for hanging pictures); and the dining room seems to glow on account of the ‘Sateen Club’ wallpaper in french grey from Phillip Jeffries. ‘Having so many different textures and rich colours adds a constant sense of rediscovery for me,’ says the owner. ‘I was looking at the shagreen in the library the other day and thought, “I should spend more time here; I really love it”’ □

Sandra Nunnerley: nunnerley.com



OPPOSITE The hall walls are clad in leather, which adds texture when set against the geometric flooring. From here, a door leads to the study, where Christopher Bucklow’s *Guest* artworks hang. THIS PAGE FROM TOP In the main bedroom, the headboard is in Holland & Sherry ‘Spectator’ fabric, with Mike and Doug Starn’s *Structure of Thought* print hung above it; the doorway to the left leads through to the dressing room. The gold stool in the bathroom is from Haas Brothers