

East Meets West Side



David and Jill Gilmour (above) chose "a Pacific Rim feeling" for their New York apartment on Central Park West. Designer Jeffrey Bilhuber transformed a four-bedroom aerie into their one-bedroom pied-à-terre.

When David and Jill Gilmour decided to sell the *hôtel particulier* they owned in Paris and buy a seasonal apartment in New York City, the couple assumed they would find a place that suited them on the East Side, where they had owned pieds-à-terre at various times in the past. "Then I recalled the downside of some of those charming East Side prewar buildings," David Gilmour says. "Air-conditioning that didn't quite work. Noisy elevators."

Chance took the Gilmours to an apartment on the forty-second floor of a glassy postwar building on Central Park West at Columbus Circle that had originally been an office tower. "The building func-



tioned perfectly, there was a great French restaurant downstairs, and the ceilings were ten and a half feet high," David Gilmour says. "When the building was used for offices, the ceilings were lower, but when it was converted to residential use, the heating,

ventilation and air-conditioning were removed from above and placed in the walls—and voilà—extra height."

While the six-foot-three entrepreneur and philanthropist finds nine-foot ceilings "claustrophobic," the Gilmours required the height

A LOVE OF ASIA INFUSES A NEW YORK PIED-A-TERRE

Interior Design by Jeffrey Bilhuber/Text by Susan Sheehan/Photography by Scott Frances



for another reason: They had recently purchased seven nine-foot-tall eighteenth-century Chinese hand-painted wallpaper panels.

Despite the generous vertical space, other elements of the apartment did not suit Jill or David Gilmour, and they

asked New York-based Jeffrey Bilhuber to transform it. "What the Gilmours bought was a standard four-bedroom, fifty-five-hundred-square-foot apartment for a mythical family," the designer says. "They wanted the place for themselves, and they wanted

it to be luxurious. Not a problem. In New York you don't buy an apartment; you buy acreage, and you deal with it."

Bilhuber was prepared to deal with the disadvantage of working in a quintessential glass-clad New York box: It had no architectural plus-

In the bamboo-floored living room, the couple mixed Asian antiquities, such as red-lacquered Ming Dynasty armchairs, with modern furnishings. Chain-link draperies prevent the view from being fully obscured. Decorators Walk ottoman horsehair. Bergamo fabric on sofa at right.



es, only architectural minuses.

The living room ceiling had a single, ill-placed beam. To disguise it, Bilhuber added others and created coffering that gives the room symmetry. He also removed and reconfigured the apartment's halls, using classical horizontal coursing.

In the Gilmours' private space, flooring came out and many walls came down. Several ordinary bedrooms, too-small baths and inadequate closets became a grand master suite. "We couldn't get

rid of an ugly concrete pillar, so I decided to glorify it by putting a floor-to-ceiling fluted column in front of it," Bilhuber says. "Behind the fluting is a closet. I like to call it the world's most glamorous broom closet."

A key architectural change was to separate, with a phantom door, the private quarters from the rooms visitors would see.

"The phantom door is right past the entrance hall and gallery," says the designer. "On it is a particularly

ABOVE: Accompanied by 18th-century painted wallpaper panels, three Han Dynasty terra-cotta horse torsos "float above the main seating area in the living room," says Bilhuber. The Discus lamps are his own design. J. Robert Scott fabric on slipper chairs. Jack Lenor Larsen sofa fabric.

LEFT: The dining room, from the hall. Donghia drapery fabric. Beauvais rug. **OPPOSITE:** *The Gorge*, 1939, by John Piper hangs on a tea-paper-paneled wall above the room's 19th-century Chinese sideboard. Chairs from the same period surround the custom-made maple table.

"IN NEW YORK YOU DON'T BUY AN APARTMENT; YOU BUY ACREAGE, AND YOU DEAL WITH IT," SAYS JEFFREY BILHUBER.



LEFT: "Four of the library's six windows were covered to create a warm and intimate space," says Bilhuber. A French burlwood bureau is near a lacquered-linen-topped writing table. Old World Weavers wallcovering. Holly Hunt sofa seat cushion and side chair fabric. Beauvais carpet.

OPPOSITE: John Wigmore's 1998 vertical parchment-wrapped steel light sculptures illuminate the master suite hall. A fluted column, at left, hides a structural pillar and a closet. The private quarters are accessed through a phantom door. Donghia grass-cloth wallcovering.

place I planned to distribute Fiji Water was in North America," he explains. Only a few of their European antiques came to Manhattan with them. "We wanted the apartment to have a Pacific Rim feeling," Jill Gilmour says. "The finest Asian antiquities and the finest contemporary modern furniture were to coexist in harmony."

In the living room are the other three red-lacquered Ming armchairs—along with four slipper chairs and a grandly scaled round ottoman, all designed by Bilhuber. "The urban view is so dominant that I was glad to be able to place the Chinese wallpaper panels on the living room's internal walls," he says. "They depict village scenes, gardens and pastoral views of pagodas. They're exquisite in themselves, and they give the room its evenness by keeping it from being too view-driven." Between two of the seven panels, three terra-cotta horse torsos float above a Bilhuber sofa. In the dining room, a set of eight nineteenth-cen-

beautiful eighteenth-century Chinese calligraphy scroll, and next to it is a red-lacquered Ming armchair, one of a set of four. If you stand in front of the Ming chair and look in one direction, you see through the living room to an expanse of windows facing east. If you look in the other direction, you

see through the dining room and out its windows, which face west. The apartment has a transparency that's truly rare in Manhattan. And it's symbolic of the theme of the apartment: the marriage of East and West."

With the Gilmours' purchase of property ten years ago in the Fiji Islands, where

they own a house and a resort, the Wakaya Club (see *Architectural Digest*, February 2001), and with David Gilmour's recent discovery and establishment of Fiji Natural Artesian Water, the couple say their lives have been dramatically changed. "We decided to leave Paris and establish a base in New York, because the first

tury *huanghuali* chairs surrounds a table of white bird's-eye maple, also designed by Bilhuber.

As for the private spaces, Jill Gilmour now has two dressing rooms and a well-proportioned bath with a tub set under a south-facing window. "I envisioned these as glamorous urban spaces," Bilhuber says. Accordingly, the dressing rooms are modern, arranged with Asian decorative artifacts, including a collection of emerald-green bowls and vases. David Gilmour's spacious dressing room is outfitted with a Japanese soaking tub and a Mies van der Rohe daybed that sits on a nineteenth-century Chinese rug. Two Le Corbusier Petit Confort chairs that once sailed the seas on the *Queen Elizabeth* dominate his study, along with his Winston Churchill art and memorabilia collections. Behind the Gilmours' bed, and set into an alcove created by



Bilhuber, is an eighteenth-century wool Aubusson tapestry depicting tropical palm trees, foliage, parakeets and a pagoda, which had hung in the two-story stairwell of their *hôtel particulier* in Paris. "From our bed we see Central Park," Jill Gilmour says. "The tapestry and the view are yin and yang."

Or, in Jeffrey Bilhuber's words, "This apartment is not about a plate of cookies next to the guest bed. There is no guest room. This apartment is about karma in the master bedroom."

Karma notwithstanding, the apartment offers something more for David Gilmour. "Now that I live on the West Side, I realize that looking at the East Side from high above Columbus Circle is very exciting," he says. "We can see a dazzling array of granite buildings, green and gold glass buildings and green copper roofs. At night, from Jill's bath and my study, we see the headlights of the cars coming up Eighth Avenue. From the forty-second floor they seem to form a string of pearls." □



ABOVE: An Aubusson tapestry sets the tone in the master bedroom. The wardrobe and hat cabinet are 17th-century Chinese. Christopher Norman silk channeled wallcovering. Bergamo bed skirt and headboard fabric. Jack Lenor Larsen rust pillow fabric. J. Robert Scott chaise fabric.



RIGHT: "In the husband's dressing room and bath, I mixed a traditional Japanese soapstone soaking tub with a Mies van der Rohe daybed in its original nutmeg leather," says Bilhuber. The gilt-edged parchment-paneled wardrobe is by the designer. The daybed is from Christie's.