

Inside a Penthouse That Floats Above Manhattan

The ode to Japanese American heritage brings the best of breezy California living to New York City—while featuring Art Deco treasures

By Katherine McGrath

Photography by William Jess Laird

Styled by Colin King

August 14, 2023



Ask Argentinian American designer [Sebastian Zuchowicki](#) to describe his style, and he will instead describe an equation. “Design is like an algebra problem,” he says. “We have a strong formula locked down in terms of scale, proportion, texture, and material. Apply it to any client’s style, and it works.” The designer, who trained under [Studio Mellone](#) and [Studio Sofield](#) before launching his eponymous firm two years ago, exemplifies this formula beautifully in his latest project, a Shigeru Ban–designed modern penthouse. The nearly 4,000-square-foot home delightfully perches atop another structure as if it emerged from below the roof’s surface a century and a half after the existing building was constructed.

For Zuchowicki and his team, the challenge was to turn a white, modern space into a home and warm it up through scale and texture, while honoring the vision laid out by the famous Japanese architect. The clients, who keep a primary residence elsewhere, wanted their Manhattan home to honor their Japanese American heritage, so Zuchowicki took them to Chelsea's [Dobrinka Salzman gallery](#) to gather inspiration from their roster of Japanese American designers. As for the furnishings, "We always try to pitch vintage to our clients," says Zuchowicki. "I would love every piece to be vintage, but that's not always realistic." So when the right vintage cannot be found, contemporary will do—only if the piece has a story filled with rich history or soul, like the Christopher Baker chandelier that hangs in the dining room. "It's a contemporary piece, but ties back to traditional Japanese lanterns, and has evolved to today's craftsmanship and standards of living," reflects Zuchowicki. In addition to the lantern, many of the pieces in the home are custom designs by Zuchowicki's studio, including the American walnut dining table above, sectional sofa in the living room, and the smart smoking table in the bedroom. "Our rule is five degrees of separation. We want to make it our own, to find the flavor that the vintage piece offers and bring it out, and to give it a twist."



Here, Zuchowicki used a tile pattern for added texture and a greater sense of geometry. Behind the sofa, vintage ceramics by Carly-Harry Stalhane and Gunnar Nyland, both from [Hostler Burrows Gallery](#), can be seen.



On the terrace, a Japanese maple sits in a planter. Inside, a handsome ceramic vessel by Donna Green from [Dobrinka Salzman Gallery](#) softly ties together the indoor and outdoor living areas.

And just as every crown needs a jewel, every room needs a focal point. But in lieu of a bar or a TV to anchor the space, Zuchowicki and his team dreamt up a (nonworking) fireplace—an architectural statement more than a decorative one—featuring plaster and silver tiled travertine from [Clé](#) to give texture and play off the geometric lines in the marble that runs along the outdoor living area. On either side of the fireplace, two clever pocket doors discreetly open to reveal a more laid-back living space. “It feels a bit old-school and modernist to have a fireplace in the front of the room to divide the space, with walkways on either side that opens to a casual den in the back,” he explains. “I like there to be special zones: one living area that’s a bit casual, and one that’s more formal, while still being in the same place and not divided.”

From there, he designed the custom rug—a must with every project—with stripes that run the length of the room and cohesively tie it together. (The graphics were specifically placed in AutoCAD so they wouldn't get covered up by furniture.) Upstairs, the clients wanted the bedroom to feel like a hotel room, but a bit more bespoke, interesting, and layered with character. The first step was to keep the hotel scale and prioritize simple, crisp whites. Behind the bed, Zuchowicki opted for a cerused walnut screen that adds a bit more texture than a traditional headboard would.



In the bedroom, Manhattan beckons from beyond. A table lamp by Carlos Ottero and a vintage 1930s H.F. Ildfast ceramic vase, both from Hostler Burrows Gallery, perch by the bed, which is custom designed by Zuchowicki's studio in mohair velvet from Dear Milano. Two vintage folding stools by Antonio Citterio, found on [1stDibs](#), stand at the foot of the bed, which is adorned with decorative pillows by Senegalese textile designer, Aissa Dione. A Mongolian cashmere rug by [Marc Phillips](#) lies underfoot.

After getting to know the clients' taste, Zuchowicki was able to introduce them to pieces from his personal favorite design movement, Art Deco. "You find out what it is about the pieces they're drawn to, and you're able to introduce them to other movements that work in the same scale," he says. "We thought, Oh if you love this, then you're going to love rustic French Deco pieces, like Pierre Chapo and Hervé Baley." As it turned out, this realization spurred a new passion for the owners in collecting such pieces. "They didn't really know this world before, and it's so exciting when you get to introduce someone to their new hobby—you feel responsible for their new dark obsession," he says with a laugh.



. A table lamp by Carlos Ottero and a vintage 1930s H.F. Ildfast ceramic vase, both from Hostler Burrows Gallery