



## This Light-Filled Apartment in a Renzo Piano Tower Has a Dark and Moody Side

New York designer Neal Thomas uses soft curves and a soothing color palette to create a cocoon-like atmosphere

BY GEOFFREY MONTES



**N**eal Thomas had just founded his namesake design firm, [Neal Thomas Enterprises](#), when he got a call from a longtime friend who was about to change apartments. It was early in 2021, and his pal—a Manhattan-based doctor—had just acquired an 1,800-square-foot unit perched in a glassy SoHo building designed by Renzo Piano, the Pritzker Prize-winning architect of the Centre Pompidou and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Thomas, whose experience includes 15 years working for Dallas design icon [Emily Summers](#), immediately agreed to take on the commission. “The process took our friendship to the next level,” he recalls.

Beginning with a blank slate, Thomas's first act was to sheathe the interiors in a soothing shade of gray to soften the natural light that floods the dwelling through curved floor-to-ceiling windows. "I wanted to balance the warmth of the white oak that Renzo chose for building," explains Thomas. To complement the radial floor plan—which affords 270-degree views of the Manhattan cityscape—he sought an array of sculptural furnishings from design galleries including Donzella, Demisch Danant, and Hostler Burrows, as well as custom commissions with buzzy designers such as Ian Felton.



The living room features lounge chairs by Joseph-Andre Motte, an Elise Fouin pendant, and an oak cocktail table by Ian Felton.  
PHOTO: JEFF HOLT



A ceramic assemblage by David Haskell looks out over the Manhattan skyline.  
PHOTO: JEFF HOLT

The living room's curving sectional, for instance, was found in a Philadelphia warehouse and took two months to refurbish with the help of Felton, who also made the bean-shaped cocktail table it curls around. "How do we draw people into this apartment in the right way?" Thomas recalls asking. "We needed these curved elements to pull you in." Located directly off a long gallery entry, this central space also presented a challenge due to being bisected by a structural column. "What you need to do with a column is accept it as a screening element," he explains. "Engage the column. It's not fair to act like it's not there. It needs a little respect."

Indeed, the column ends up helping delineate the adjoining dining area, which has a distinctly Italian vibe thanks to its sleek Stilnovo chandelier, cluster of midcentury chairs by Gastone Rinaldi, and a tulip table by Angelo Mangiarotti for Bernini. Presiding over everything is a glazed assemblage by ceramic artist David Haskell that takes on an abstracted human form. "Having this bronzed figure looking out over the city with a watchful eye is something we do architecturally," he says. "It's not a gargoyle, but it isn't *not* a gargoyle."





An abstract painting by Per Kirkeby, from Michael Werner gallery, gives the primary bedroom a moody vibe.

PHOTO: JEFF HOLT

Art also figures prominently in the primary bedroom, which features an abstract canvas by Danish painter Per Kirkeby saturated with rich, moody hues. “The palette in the bedroom started out of necessity—to be an escape from the noisy city,” notes Thomas, who sought to create a juxtaposition with the rest of the glassy, light-filled residence. “I find a monochromatic palette is best to make a cocoon,” he adds. To that end, he sheathed the chamber in a deep bluish-gray and deployed a silky Stark rug, bronze lamps, a suede bedcover, leather credenza, and jet-black curtains to create layers of texture. Tying it all together is a Francis Bacon lithograph above the bed featuring distorted human figures in states of unclear but potent emotion.

When the client has guests in town, they sleep in the den—a soothing space presided over by a turquoise A.R. Penck canvas. Beneath it, a vintage Alvar Aalto cocktail table finds a companion in a sensual sleeper sofa with lucite arms that Thomas found at a public estate sale. “It was basically on the side of the street,” he recalls. “We had to make a new mattress for it, but I love finding solutions. The client says people stay there at the time.”



The den includes a canvas by A.R. Penck from Michael Werner gallery.  
PHOTO: JEFF HOLT



A Francis Bacon work hangs in the primary bedroom.  
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