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A PENTHOUSE WITH MODERN FLAIR

VIVID COLOR IN MOROCCO

BOLD, FRESH FLORALS

UPWARD TRAJECTORY

WHEN A COUPLE ADDS A PENTHOUSE FLOOR TO THEIR PARK AVENUE APARTMENT, THEY TURN TO THEIR TRUSTED DECORATOR, BUNNY WILLIAMS, WHO SURPRISES THEM WITH AN UPDATED TAKE ON HER SIGNATURE STYLE

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In the living area of a Manhattan penthouse designed by Bunny Williams, a custom-made sofa slipcovered in a Duralee fabric, a vintage leather armchair from Amy Perlin Antiques, and a 1940s Italian chair surround a resin-and-Lucite Pierre Giraudon cocktail table from John Salibello Antiques; the ceiling is crafted from blue glass panels encased in a zinc frame, and the fireplace is of patinated zinc. FACING PAGE: A staircase fabricated in molded glass, resin, and stainless steel leads from the main floor of the apartment to the top floor. See Resources.

SHE'S BEEN HAILED as one of the great decorators in the classical tradition, but Bunny Williams graciously begs to differ. "I like an interior that defies labeling," she says in her no-nonsense manner. "I don't really want someone to walk into a room and know that I did it." Indeed, if not for the trademark drinks tray, inviting sofa with its loose fabric cover, and playful concrete ram grazing in the living area of a Manhattan space Williams recently completed, even her most devout disciples might have trouble pegging the place to her.

Williams's clients, empty nesters who first approached her years earlier to decorate their country house and later the formal Park Avenue apartment they still call home, longed for a more casual retreat in the city—one that blurred the lines between indoor and out. So when the penthouse above them finally became available after a 10-year wait, the pair called on their trusted decorator. "Each time we work together, Bunny perfectly translates how we want to live," says the wife. "Her interiors tell the story of where we are in our life as a family. And this time we wanted a sleek, spare hangout that could double as guest quarters, a place that had the feel of a downtown loft."

Neither strictly modern nor classically traditional—more Albert Hadley than Sister Parish (the legendary design duo with whom Williams began her career)—her decoration of the 1,500-square-foot space inspired the designer to choose a different term for her approach. "It's transitional," she says, "which means that when someone walks in here in 25 years, they won't be able to tell when it was done." After gutting what was once a handful of traditional rooms that had belonged to an elderly couple who lived there for decades, Williams first focused on the envelope. "I wanted it to be as architecturally interesting as the floor

Early-19th-century columns flank the entrance to the wife's study, which contains a wastebasket by BeeLine Home, Williams's line of home furnishings, and a vintage stool by Jules-Emile Leleu; the desk lamp and Moroccan rug are vintage. **FACING PAGE:** In the husband's study, French armchairs from Amy Perlin Antiques are upholstered in a Schumacher fabric, an antique Indian grain grinder covered in an ikat fabric serves as an ottoman, and the cardboard stools are by Frank Gehry. See Resources.

downstairs," she says, referring to the muscular crown moldings throughout. "Flat ceilings and no moldings just didn't seem right. It had to be something edgier." Her clients, whom Williams credits with inspiring her to be as inventive as she could, loved the idea of exposed beams, a concept Williams ran with, although in a surprising direction. To forge a connection between the interior and the wraparound terrace, she installed blue glass on the ceiling to mimic the sky and added architectural detail with a framework of tailored zinc beams. "It took us 20 tries to get the size of the bolts in them right," she says with a laugh. More zinc spans the central wall in the living room, surrounding the fireplace and flat-screen television above it. The floors are laid with slabs of honed pink granite, and mica-flecked plaster coats the walls.

It's a mix that, in the wrong hands, could leave a place cold. But warmth is in Williams's DNA, and once she built out the bones of the space, the rest was a matter of keeping the design simple while piling on texture. "My client had very strong opinions and was able to verbalize the feeling she wanted, which is a gift," says Williams. "She has a

wonderful appreciation for patina." Good thing, given that her decorator thought nothing of flanking the entry to her study with a pair of battered 19th-century American fluted columns with ornate Ionic capitals and using an African woman's dance stool as a drinks table next to an Italian Art Moderne chair. It was only when Williams homed in on the 1960s Lucite-legged resin cocktail table—perfect for the living room—that her client raised an eyebrow. "When you've been in this business as long as I have, there's only one real rule to follow: Buy pieces that are beautiful, no matter their age," Williams says. "I never would have looked at that table 20 years ago, but it's essential to see pieces anew, to refresh your eye." And her eyes are always open. The powder room wall covering—an album of family photos printed on glazed canvas scrawled with white gold—was inspired by grisaille walls she once saw in a European dining room and by her client's love of the artist Jean-Michel Basquiat. She spotted the guest bed at a closet shop, of all places, in Florida. When not in use, the Houdini-like affair rises up to hide in a glamorous red-lacquer bookcase of her own design.

Even more magical than the pullout bed, though, is the arabesque staircase leading to the new penthouse space. Spiraling up from the living room, the marvel of steel, resin, and glass hints at what lies above. "The stairs themselves build a degree of anticipation, so I had to be sure the payoff at the top was as surprising as they are," Williams says. Mission accomplished. "I've shown new clients this space, and they don't believe I did it," she says with a laugh. "It tickles me to death." ■

An André Sornay table and chairs and a custom-made bookcase in the library, which doubles as a guest bedroom. **FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** The vintage Italian mirror and Sornay console in the living area are from Bernd Goeckler Antiques; a pair of 18th-century candlesticks were converted into lamps, and the teak sphere is from Treillage. The powder room walls feature photos of the family's travels; the mother-of-pearl-inlay table is Syrian, and the sconces are from John Rosselli & Associates. In the library/guest room, the remote control–operated bed slides out from the bookcase; the linens and cashmere throw are by Schweitzer Linen. See Resources.