





Lacquered walls and a custom-made St. Thomas-style sofa upholstered in a Lee Jofa velvet set a glamorous tone in Todd Alexander Romano's New York City pied-à-terre. A Ward Bennett wicker Sled chair and prints by Robert Goodnough and Josef Albers provide lively counterpoints. For details see Sources.

# Small Wonder

A bold color palette gives designer Todd Romano's pocket-size Manhattan studio big presence

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In his nearby showroom, Romano surrounds himself with books, art, and other sources of inspiration. OPPOSITE: Works by Andy Warhol, Alberto Giacometti, David Hockney, Albers, and others pop against the dark walls of the apartment's entrance hall.

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HEN DESIGNER TODD Alexander Romano went hunting for a Manhattan apartment, he knew he wanted a modest space—and a not-so-modest view. “I want the city, I have to look at the city!” he told

his real-estate broker. Nothing if not exuberant, he embraced with gusto the idea of one-room living in a new glass tower near his eclectic and singularly cheerful eponymous showroom on East 59th Street, where top decorators are regular customers.

“It’s the one style of New York home I’ve never had before,” says Romano, a beloved raconteur and profligate mover with a history of residing in prewar townhouses on tony tree-lined

blocks. “To live in a glass box in the sky is like the Manhattan I remember from the movies as a child. It’s just the quintessential New York experience.”

The studio’s tidy size (600 square feet) struck Romano as a plus, not a deficit—even as a bit of a relief. He travels constantly and already has a 2,000-square-foot apartment in Los Angeles, not to mention two stores, including a new shop on La Cienega Boulevard in West Hollywood, where some of the furniture from his previous New York home migrated. Used to grand commissions, he found decorating a studio a welcome challenge. “Good design is about editing,” he notes. “You can live very well in one room.”

Especially when you’re overlooking all of Manhattan. Romano knew the upper-floor apartment, with its wall of windows, would be bright all day. But he also knew, as a peripatetic man-about-town, that he’d mostly be there at night, when the city would be a glittering sea beneath what he calls his regal eagle’s nest.

“To decorate, I took a page right out of Billy Baldwin,”



Arrayed in a corner are books, flowers, art, and binoculars—a high-rise must—from Hammacher Schlemmer.

OPPOSITE: A circa-1960 French games table offers a modest dining surface. The 18th-century chairs are covered in parrot-green velvet from Old World Weavers.



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Romano says. In fact, it seems he took a few. Baldwin was a master of the mix, a modernist who despised clutter, believed that function should define form, and was unafraid to use bold colors in all kinds of ways. His work included Cole Porter's famous tortoiseshell library and Diana Vreeland's equally celebrated Chinese-red living room.

Romano chose as his defining color a moody midnight-blue. "It makes structure recede, so the space feels bigger," he explains. "At night, this apartment is a deep-blue jewel box." After lacquering all the walls, he designed a sectional sofa that would double as his bed and upholstered it in velvet of a similar rich blue. To up the glamour, he often covers it with a silver-fox-fur throw. And he uses dimmers so the lights of the city have little competition.

By day, it's easier to appreciate the designer's hallmark combination of modern and classic furnishings, with daring splashes of color everywhere. The walls pop with bright, graphic prints by Victor Vasarely and Josef Albers and watercolors by Jean Cocteau and Hugo Guinness. In the middle of the room, on a zebra-skin rug, Romano has placed a small Louis XV-style *voysuse* from Frederick P. Victoria & Son that he upholstered in blue leather. A lamp crafted from an antique Chinese vase is an ebullient mix of orange and green, while faux malachite in an optimistic shade of aquamarine tops a midcentury Maison Jansen cocktail table he picked up at a flea market in Paris.

"With new apartments like this, you can't rely on the architecture, so it's all about the decorating," Romano says. By the windows he's placed a series of whimsical brass sculptures by the 20th-century Mexican artist Feliciano Béjar and a 1960s Ward Bennett chrome-and-wicker Sled chair. In a nearby corner a colorful array of crystal and coral covers a Louis XVI-style commode.

It's a very happy mash-up—and typical of the gleeful decorating approach Romano uses in all the impressive residences he has designed, from Greenwich, Connecticut, to Beverly Hills. Romano grew up in San Antonio, studied architecture at the University of Texas, then learned his trade working in New York for decorators such as Tony Ingrao and Mario Buatta. He went out on his own in 2000, when he established his Manhattan showroom. That would be where he surrounds himself with thousands of art and design books for inspiration. His apartment, however, has almost no books at all. "When I'm here it isn't about work, it's about calm," he says.

And, on occasion, a little mischief. "When I moved in, I just had to have binoculars," he says as he scans Central Park through his windows. But more often Romano relaxes after a hectic day by cuddling on his sofa with his suitably sized miniature dachshund, Bunny, and watching vintage movies.

"What else does anyone need?" he asks. □