

A man with glasses, wearing a light blue button-down shirt and dark trousers, stands in a living room. He is leaning against a white fireplace mantel on the right. Behind him is a large, multi-tiered bookshelf filled with books. The top two shelves of the bookshelf are filled with dark, uniform books. The middle shelves contain a variety of colorful books. Below the bookshelf, there are framed pictures and a lamp. In the foreground, a green upholstered armchair is positioned next to a small table with a vase of pink flowers. The room has yellow walls and a patterned rug.

Decorist Christopher Spitzmuller in the living room of his prewar Manhattan apartment; a circa-1775 Louis XVI bergère is upholstered in Madoc cotton by Stark Fabric, and the walls were glazed egg-yolk yellow by Mark Giglio. Facing page: In the front hall, a Cape Linden mirror by Bill Sullivan hangs above a shell-encrusted console from a Southampton thrift shop, and the Serpentine Dragon lamp is Spitzmuller's own design. See Resources.



GOLDEN TOUCH

WITH INSPIRATION FROM AN ICONIC LONDON DRAWING ROOM, CERAMIST CHRISTOPHER SPITZMILLER CONJURES A SOPHISTICATED UPPER EAST SIDE FLAT

TEXT BY SHAX RIEGLER · PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILLIAM WALDRON
PRODUCED BY ANITA SARSI

Homey may not be the word one expects a 35-year-old artisan in New York City to use to describe how he wants his apartment to feel. But as ceramist and lamp designer Christopher Spitzmiller looks around his trim one-bedroom on the Upper East Side, it is the first adjective that comes to mind. And with reason: Rich with color and punctuated with prized bibelots and books, the place is the visual definition of domesticity. There's not a plasma TV or technological gadget in sight, and even his first major purchase—a plush, inviting Langham & Co. sofa in the living room—speaks to the theme. Says Spitzmiller, “I used to come home and sit on that sofa and simply will this place to be pretty.”

Although the flat is now a bright and cheerful retreat from the manifold pressures of his business life—creating distinctive, highly coveted ceramic lamps—the ground-floor, prewar apartment was anything but that when Spitzmiller moved in five years ago. Dark, with only two small windows in the living room, the place had good bones, but

measured just under 800 square feet. It was bland, with walls coated landlord-beige, and while it was marketed as having outdoor space, Spitzmiller admits “that meant crawling through the kitchen window into the bottom of an air shaft.”

To start, he knocked out a living room window and installed a door to access what would become an elegant little terrace. He then covered the ground with a thick layer of white gravel and added Gothic Revival wrought-iron furniture, lush potted plants, and a border of bamboo. Inside, Spitzmiller drew inspiration from varied sources, including the work of legendary society decorator Nancy Lancaster, and the interiors firm of Sibyl Colefax and John Fowler, which Lancaster once owned. A London pied-à-terre in the fashionable Albany, a residence built in the 1770s for aristocratic bachelors, particularly resonated with Spitzmiller. It was designed by John Fowler for the late U.S. Ambassador David K.E. Bruce and his wife, Evangeline, a tastemaker in her own right. “I fell in love with the comfortable luxury,” says Spitzmiller.



Clockwise, from top left: In the living room, a 19th-century painted secretary, and pieces of Tiana Valcarlos' collection by Christie's House. The Ogee cocktail table is by Langham & Co. Louis XVI dining chair and a later skirt in English Oak Leaf by Demme. The two rooms introduced in upstairs are in a Lee Jofa cotton, and the bedding is by Jacqueline Jones. An 18th-century Louis XIV carved oval mirror from Soriat House Antiques, a George III mahogany chest, a lamp by Christopher Spitzmuller, and a nest seen by Stark fabric in the bedroom. The Georgian shelves in the kitchen were purchased at auction. See Resources.





Lancaster's celebrated "butter yellow" drawing room was the starting point for his decor. He chose a warm orangey-yellow that is close to the color of egg yolk and used it to lacquer the walls in the living room and hall. The influence of the Albany apartment shows up in several pieces that he purchased through a dealer and friend who helped the Bruce estate sell many of the family belongings. The items include a small side table, and a pair of neoclassical-inspired medallions painted by the muralist George Oakes, a longtime employee of Colefax and Fowler, that flank the sofa.

Spitzmiller also turned to some contemporary decorators for help, including Todd Romano and Albert Hadley, one of Spitzmiller's earliest lamp clients. Romano worked with a decorative painter to perfect the shade of lacquer—it took "at least seven samples, Christopher was so specific," he says—and also recommended the paisley linen that sheathes the bedroom walls. Hadley vetted fabric choices and steered Spitzmiller to just the right striped cotton to upholster his sculptural headboard.

The designer's other role was to proffer advice about art placement, which he executed by sending over a sketch of how he thought some paintings should be rearranged. Hadley's drawing showed a large work on top and a smaller one below—the opposite of how they were originally hung. "Albert was right, of course," Spitzmiller says. Hadley adds that he wasn't following any decorative rule, just common sense. "The little picture was so high up that you couldn't see it," he says. Now you can, and Hadley's instructional drawing, framed, has pride of place on a bookshelf.

Also adding a personal touch to the home are books that reflect Spitzmiller's interests, from vintage cookbooks he mines for dinner-party ideas to old biographies, and a shelf of first-edition Edward Goreys. Family snapshots are intermingled with photographs of society figures taken by the late Slim Aarons and others. Near a small picture of young Spitzmiller and his siblings is a black-and-white image of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor whipping up something in the kitchen. It's an amusing juxtaposition and one could easily think that all the pictures were of one incredibly chic family.

The suite of rooms, full of gentlemanly warmth and sophisticated, classic furnishings, could almost have been transported from quarters at Albany—a bachelor pad from an earlier, more gracious era. "I like old things," says Spitzmiller, "but you can have too many of them. And I think the colors set everything off and make it feel right for now." That philosophy applies especially to the light-blue walls of the foyer. "It's a more modern shade," says Spitzmiller, "it's meant to prepare me for leaving the apartment and going out into the world." ■