

# GENTLEMAN'S QUARTERS

FASHION ARBITER ROBERT BURKE BRINGS HOME HIS SHARP EYE AND CONSUMMATE TASTE  
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Robert Burke, a senior vice president of Bergdorf Goodman, is front of the legendary Manhattan store; his Murray Hill apartment was decorated by Todd Romano. Facing page: In the living room, a sofa upholstered in a Rogers & Goffigon linen is flanked by marble-and-brass gueridons found at a Paris flea market and Christopher Spitzmuller table lamps; the vintage tree-stump tables are glazed terra-cotta. See Reddross.



"People can skimp on a lot when it comes to their homes," says Robert Burke, senior vice president of the fashion office and public relations at Manhattan's Bergdorf Goodman. "But the art on their walls and the wine they serve speak a lot about their personality." If that pronouncement makes Burke sound at all snobbish, he's not. In fact, he might be one of the most gracious and well-mannered men in the fashion business. He just happens to have impeccable taste, the kind that makes you jealous that you aren't a little bit more like him. Take, for example, his art collection, which includes a work by Jasper Johns and photographs by Steven Klein and Bert Stern, and his wine collection, gathered on trips around the world (but heavy on his weakness, French Bordeaux). Both speak to his strong, refined vision.

But then a good eye is a prerequisite for his job, which involves discovering the newest in fashion and design and setting the direction for Manhattan's renowned specialty store. Both established designers, including Oscar de la Renta and Chanel, and up-and-comers, like Derek Lam and Zao Posen, flourish at Bergdorf. And thanks to Burke, British interior designer Kelly Hoppen and New Orleans-based Leontine Linens recently opened in-store boutiques there. Not only does Burke seek out and nurture talent, he is also friends with some of the exquisite tastemakers of our time. The late C. Z. Guest, with whom Burke spent many weekends at Templeton, her home on Long Island, was a major inspiration. "C. Z. was truly comfortable with whatever she surrounded herself with," he says. "She would set the table with George III silver and then add an empty Ruinart wine bottle filled with perfect peonies from her garden. Her self-confidence in style impressed me."

So when it came time for Burke to renovate and decorate his Murray Hill two-bedroom apartment, rather than choosing an era or theme, he let his love of art, antiques, and objets d'art take precedence. "The thing I admire most is personality in a space," explains Burke. "I find 'period' decorating boring, and the last thing I wanted was a 'decorated' place. Plus, my taste in artwork is very modern. It drives my interior."

Burke teamed with Todd Romano, a longtime friend, on the project because, as Burke puts it: "Any other interior designer would have fired me. I make aesthetic decisions every day in my job, so my expectations were high. But at the same time, I wanted someone who would push me." Romano, however, couldn't disagree more: "It was easy! Robert is very focused, and his input is always valid. He and I like the same things: we both have a love of simple, classic furniture, a lot of Louis XVI. I really just helped Robert get the background right—the parchment wallpaper in the entry, the rugs. What makes the apartment sing is his artwork."



Facing page: In the living room, a 1930s Swedish stained-birch bergère from Sentimento Antiques, one of a pair, and a Louis XVI secrétaire; the watercolor above it is from the estate of Bill Glass and the artworks to the right are by Robert Adams and Joshua Abelow. This page, from top: The table is covered in Buchan wool from Lee-Jefa; the photograph, *Horse Neck (3 in a Series of 4)*, is by Steven Klein. A 19th-century Irish console and a Louis XVI fauteuil are from Todd Alexander Romano Antiques and Decoration; the stuffed callio bird and the framed stick insect are from Deyrolle. See Resources.



WITH ITS DEEP-NAVY STRIPE WALLS, COMFORTABLE SEATING, AND IMPRESSIVE VIEW OF THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING, THE LIBRARY, SAYS BURKE, IS "THE PERFECT NEW YORK NIGHT ROOM"

Burke hired husband-and-wife architects Alex Pomarico and Leslie Steven of Poma & Steven, whom he had known when he worked at Polo Ralph Lauren, where the duo consulted on retail design. "When we first saw Robert's apartment, we recognized its potential, but it was asymmetric," says Pomarico. "We made small shifts to create symmetry and flow." They closed off the entrance to the kitchen from the foyer, realigned some doors, and raised the door heights. "That allowed light to move throughout the apartment," he says.

After that, the apartment basically fell into an ordered chicness. With an abstract cloud drawing over the sofa, a stuffed callio bird and a framed stick bug from Paris's famous taxidermist Deyrolle, and a pair of terra-cotta tree stumps in the living room. Burke admits that perhaps "subconsciously there's a nature thing going on. But I never planned it." The real driving force behind the design of the room, he says,

was simply, "Where are people going to put their cocktails?" An avid entertainer, Burke often serves dinner buffet-style from his skirted table in the living room. Parties usually spill into the library, originally a second bedroom. With its deep-navy stripe walls and comfortable seating, "it's the perfect New York night room," says Burke. The impressive view of the Empire State Building adds to its swanky glamour.

Burke, who travels close to four months a year, had only one request for his bedroom: "The inspiration was a good hotel room, where everything, such as the light and TV switches, is convenient." Romano suggested using the same fabric for both walls and curtains. "There is something cozy and cocoonish about it," the designer explains. "The bedroom should be the most soothing and luxurious room in the house." But then the whole place is as precisely fitted as a work of couture. "The apartment looks like Robert," adds Romano. "It's like a great tailored suit, and it fits him to a tee!" ■



Drawings by Marc van Cauwenbergh hang above a Ralph Lauren Home bed with bedding by Leonline Linens; the 1920s French steel table is from Sentimento Antiques. Facing page, from left: in the library, midcentury chrome-and-leather chairs, and a custom-made zebra rug by Poma & Steven. Works by David Hockney, Steven Klein, and Jasper Johns, and a 19th-century English mahogany hall chair in the bedroom. See Resources.