

# LOOKING ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

A city  
apartment  
gets a rush of  
happy-go-lucky  
color—from  
a melon-hued  
living room to a  
mantel tiled  
in cobalt.

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In the living room of an apartment on New York City's Upper East Side, designer Katie Ridder and architect John B. Murray found a balance between youthful energy and traditional restraint. "The clients were so positive and engaged, they kept wanting to amp up the color," says Ridder, who hung framed intaglios from KRB on the dyed-silk de Gournay wallpaper. The Swedish secretary is from Eileen Lane Antiques. Rug, Studio Four NYC.



Ridder found a Lee Jofa floral print for the living-room sofa but had the upholsterer apply the fabric inside out for a muted effect. The coffered ceilings are in Gilded Age Foil by Scalamantré. **OPPOSITE:** Upholstering dining chairs in two fabrics—the backs are in Uzbek by Brunschwig & Fils—was “another opportunity to sneak pattern into the room,” Ridder says. Wallpaper, Twenty2.



**All of these colors are so joyful, without feeling overdone. What's your secret?**

**KATIE RIDDER:** The architecture makes the brights work. John so perfectly contained each room in a package that these out-of-the-box colors don't feel overwhelming. Of course, you have to create segues between the rooms—you can't just jump from red to green to blue. I used a little bit of the watermelon color from the living room in the next room over, and so on.

**JOHN B. MURRAY:** Color draws you through the apartment. You see a fun color in the next room, and you want to keep going.

**FRED NICOLAUS:** Was there any resistance from the clients?

**KR:** It's funny, I initially presented them with a tamer palette, and they were the ones to say, "No, we want more color!" They're a very smart, fun young couple with three kids. They wanted a scheme that skews traditional, but it also had to reflect their lifestyle.

**How do you find that balance between classic and contemporary?**

**JBM:** Knowing what *not* to do is just as important as knowing what to do. We didn't want to overly ornament the moldings. An egg-and-dart pattern would've been too much. But adding a

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—John B. Murray



little bit of texture, like the fluting we incorporated into the friezes, adds a finesse that's really important.

**KR:** It's all about the details. For example, we found a fabric for the formal living room sofa that we loved, but the colors were too bright. I had the upholsterer install it inside out, with the back of the print facing outward. That softened the colors and gave the sofa a patina that hit just the right note.

**The apartment has such a wonderful range—modern art, antiques, eye-catching furniture. What's the key to the mix?**

**KR:** It can be tricky! You have to think about the whole space. We started by getting the fabrics and furniture in place, then we began to layer in the smaller things. I knew I wanted to bring in a good amount of wood furniture. English antiques were important in this project.

**The secretary in the living room is stately, but the wood grain is so striking, it almost looks like abstract art.**

**KR:** It feels like sculpture, right? So often nowadays, people want contemporary furnishings in materials like lacquer and metal. Maybe it's just a personal preference, but I like having wood in a room. It lends warmth and sophistication.

**I understand the clients are in the entertainment business?**

**KR:** The wife is a writer. They're both big readers, and they wanted to live surrounded by books. The husband is in television, so of course we put a TV in almost every room, too.

**I barely noticed that! How did you blend them in?**

**KR:** When a room needs to be oriented toward a TV, I try to make the furniture plan feel dynamic. So I might place a sofa in front of the screen, but instead of adding another sofa to the seating arrangement, I'll bring in a few unexpected elements—maybe a simple wood-frame chair. The arrangement will be functional but will feel collected—not like everything was brought in on a truck on moving day.

**JBM:** At least one of the flat-screens is actually hidden. It's disguised behind a mirror over the fireplace.

**Clever camouflaging! One thing that struck me about the apartment was**

**RIGHT:** The homeowners chose a book-themed artwork by Phil Shaw (*far right*) as a starting point for this family room. The armchair (*left*) is covered in Lee Jofa's Haslam. Rug, Studio Four NYC. Artwork over fireplace, Alexis England. **BELOW:** The wife's office, in a quiet corner of the apartment, is a colorful retreat. The walls are in Benjamin Moore Arroyo Red. The window shades are Quadrielle's Bunga Print. Rug, Studio Four NYC. **OPPOSITE, BELOW:** Ridder looked for "cushy, tactile fabrics" to use in the family room. The sofa is in a Brunschwig & Fils mohair. The Leora Armstrong artwork is from Gerald Bland.



**“They wanted traditional, but it had to reflect who they are.”**  
—Katie Ridder

**the sheer amount of space. I lost count of the rooms.**

**JBM:** As we've been talking, I was counting the bathrooms—there are 11. **Wow.**

**KR:** And all of them are beautifully designed!

**JBM:** The project called for combining two apartments. We ended up with more than 7,000 square feet. A big challenge was rearticulating the space for modern living. People didn't have central air-conditioning back in 1929, when this was built. With so much room it really allowed the clients to have their cake and eat it, too, such as the informal *and* formal living areas.

**Katie, how did you create those distinct casual versus serious vibes?**

**KR:** For the former, I thought a lot about the kids—I wanted to make spaces they would consider cozy. To me, that means employing darker colors and tactile surfaces. And because they are small children, the fabrics have to be durable. There are many interesting options for that—mohair is one of my favorites. There are scratchy mohairs and soft mohairs, and they're all easy to clean with soap and water.

**And when the couple wants to get away from the hustle and bustle of family life?**

**KR:** They were focused on their kids, but they wanted cool grown-up rooms, too! He asked for a library and a bar, and she wanted a private office where she could work in peace. The raspberry shade is exciting but not overwhelming—it's the perfect hue for a creative space.







Pattern play brings sophistication to a pink-and-green color scheme in the daughter's bedroom, where the wallpaper is a Ridder design. The Charles H. Beckley daybed is covered in a Brunschwig & Fils wool, and the shams are in a Ferrick Mason print. A Visual Comfort table lamp is topped with a shade by Shades from the Midnight Sun. The room's trim is in Benjamin Moore Chantilly Lace. **OPPOSITE:** "The boys wanted to be able to have sleepovers in each other's rooms," says Ridder, who took inspiration from English boarding schools. The draping around the beds and the carpet are by Holland & Sherry. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES