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PRIVATE VIEWING

*For a gentleman collector
of rare breadth and
vision, Marjorie Reed Gordon crafts
a serene Upper East Side penthouse retreat
where art is the star*

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Art was always going to be the focus of this Upper East Side penthouse, the property of a collector who wanted to display his paintings, sculpture, and photographs in a cool, modernist environment. "I was trying to be understated rather than overstated," he says by way of explaining the pristine space. "I wanted a place that is very relaxing, that's all white, and that serves mainly as a background to the artists' work."

To accomplish that, he brought in Marjorie Reed Gordon, a longtime friend and well-known decorator, to renovate the jewel-like apartment that had once belonged to a Vanderbilt.

"The pictures were always the first consideration, and everything else is a backdrop for the magnificent collection," says Gordon, who understood right away that what's on the walls is the one thing that makes the rooms sing. Of course, this is her seventh project with the client, so she also knew exactly what he meant when he said he wanted something very relaxing.

"It's a penthouse with incredible bones overlooking the world," says Gordon. "The boiserie in the library is amazing. The terrace is the single most beautiful terrace in New York City." But her client called for utter simplicity—a serene and spare space with all-white walls and filled with streamlined midcentury furniture. To that end, there is a Karl Springer goatskin-covered table with a Lucite base in the living room, a black-and-white bench inspired by the designs of

LEFT: In the living room of a penthouse apartment designed by Marjorie Reed Gordon for a Manhattan art collector, a custom-made sofa upholstered in a Kravet fabric faces vintage chairs by T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings with cushions covered in a Holly Hunt fabric; the bench is by Mies van der Rohe, the table lamps are by SCDS Ltd., miniature stabile sculptures by Alexander Calder sit atop the cocktail table, and Pablo Picasso's 1971 *Homme Nu Assis* hangs above the custom-made fireplace. For details, see Resources.

The living room's vintage table and floor lamp are by Karl Springer, the side chairs are covered in a fabric by Kravet, and the side table is by SCDS Ltd.; the custom-made rug is by Beauvais Carpets. **FACING PAGE:** Artworks in the apartment include photographs from Irving Penn's "Small Trades" series and a painting by Agnes Martin; a lacquered tabletop by Robert Kuo sits on a base from the client's collection, the bowl by Kevin Grey is from Maison Gerard, and the flooring is limed oak. For details, see Resources.





T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings, and a round tabletop from Robert Kuo that Gordon had lacquered white.

"It's really not about the decoration," Gordon demurs. "It's about living beautifully with simple things and art."

Indeed, a spectacular late Picasso floats over the fireplace—"one of the few late Picassos" he owns, says the collector. "I found it extremely interesting because it's so different." It's also the only artwork in the apartment that boasts any color. In the master bedroom, a muted Agnes Martin painting reflects the creamy simplicity of the space. Perhaps the biggest statement in the apartment is the grid of 18 photographs by Irving Penn. The portraits are from his famous "Small Trades" series, shot in the 1950s, of skilled tradespeople in work clothes and carrying the tools of their occupation. The subtle contrast between the austerity of Penn's subjects and the sophistication of their setting seems to mimic the mood of the apartment.

The homeowner, who has been collecting Penn's work for more than 35 years, decided to display the images in the fashion he believed the artist had conceived them. "When thinking about installing art, one has to think about what the artist had in mind,"

he explains. The inspiration for this display came from a show of Jim Dine's "Hearts" series at the Whitney Museum of American Art. In that show, the curator had installed more than 30 of Dine's "Hearts" paintings on one wall.

"I realized that when you put the series together, you see it both as a collection and as individual works. And that's what I wanted," he says. "Penn captured a moment in history that is disappearing—the working-class small trades of England, France, and America—so I thought, Let's put them all together. Where else will you see a chimney sweep today?"

The Penn series, which was originally inspired by 19th-century prints of characters—what the French called *types*—includes more than 70 images. He chooses to display only a fraction of the entire collection, and to place them in the same room with a quadrant of the photographer's "New Guinea" series from the late 1960s.

"My client has traveled so much, and he has seen the best of everything," Gordon says. "If anything, the simplicity of this space and the beauty of his collection are about living a life of great quality." No need to overstate it. ■