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SEPTEMBER 2025

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EAST SIDE STORY

The only way this home's owners could handle living on Park Avenue was by getting their designers to create a Scandinavian-style apartment in New York

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Dining room As playful as a picnic blanket, walls are covered in Classic Cloth's 'Ellington Check' fabric in 'Blush'. Getting the checks perfectly straight was a challenge that the experienced local installers and contractors tackled together. Around a vintage Finn Juhl dining table are six 'Barcelona' chairs by Kaare Klint for Rud Rasmussen from Klassik Moderne Möbelkunst, with a 'Dinner' chandelier by Adolf Loos overhead. The custom Swedish-style flat-weave rug is by Doris Leslie Blau and the custom Shaker bench in maple is by Sawyer Made ►



Living room A beautiful custom Swedish Rya-style rug by Doris Leslie Blau is the heart of this airy, colourful room. A generous Commune Collection 'Muffin' sofa by George Smith and a bespoke half-back sofa wrap the space, with a custom free-form bronze-and-walnut slab coffee table by Michael Boyd/BoydDesign in the centre. An 'Ilse' ottoman by George Smith and a pair of vintage teak Finn Juhl 'NV45' armchairs by Niels Vodder from JF Chen complete the seating. Under the tall windows runs a long Shaker bench in maple; local maker Sawyer Made crafted it on site, so it can never leave intact. In the corner by the window, Josef Frank's 'Armchair 1165' for Svenskt Tenn is paired with a marble-topped cast-bronze table by Black Creek Mercantile & Trading Co. All the lighting in this room and throughout the home is from Woka Lamps in Vienna

Commune Design founder Roman Alonso faced a dilemma when his longstanding northern Californian clients asked him to help them turn a duplex in a grand building on Park Avenue into a home. Ten years before, he had designed the bohemian couple's house in Inverness, north of San Francisco, drawing on their love of Sweden – specifically Ilse Crawford's Ett Hem hotel in Stockholm – for the interiors. 'There's a relationship between the two places in terms of weather and attitude,' he observes. Now, however, they needed a Manhattan base for work and couldn't see themselves as New Yorkers. One of the owners had grown up on the Upper East Side but 'escaped', while the other never imagined living uptown. 'It was just not her vibe,' Roman recalls.

The neoclassical building was designed in 1927 by JER Carpenter, one of the most sought-after architects of the time. Although the decor was dated (think 1980s spongework and faux marble), the apartment had excellent bones and retained some original plaster cornices and herringbone-oak floors. Roman saw an opportunity to simplify things, explaining 'that it would not only make it more modern and casual, but bring it closer to that idea of this Stockholm apartment in New York'. Recognising that he was far outside his comfort zone, he brought in an expert: architect Elizabeth Roberts, who is known for her work on stately old Brooklyn brownstones. 'I've always admired Elizabeth,' he says. 'She minimises detailing to a point where it's still grand, but has a more comfortable, laid-back attitude. She modernises things without them looking modern.'

'One of the reasons JER Carpenter apartments are considered so desirable is because they always had gracious floor plans,' explains Elizabeth. She kept its basic arrangement (with the living room, dining area and library arranged around the stairwell), enlarging the openings between the rooms to create a more unified layout. The kitchen, however, was a cramped back-of-house space – designed for when families had live-in staff – so they opened it ►





Kitchen A cream-coloured Lacanche 'Salieu' range cooker is framed by blue and white delft tiles from Douglas Watson Studio in this practical yet characterful space. The honed Calacatta Caldia marble and oiled-white-oak counter gives a relaxed feel, while the café curtains 'lead your eye up to the sky', Roman explains. The American-white-oak 'Marolles' stool is by Carneros Studios
Above, from left Kitchen cabinets painted in 'Green Smoke' from Farrow & Ball; Mauny's 'Fleurs' wallpaper adds a touch of whimsical colour and pattern to the powder room, where a The Water Monopoly 'Soho' basin is paired with a custom brass backsplash, and unlacquered-brass taps from Barber Wilsons. The 'Luroy' sconce is by Lumfardo Luminaires and the vintage brass mirror is by Josef Frank

up and worked hard to conceal awkward columns and pipes within new cabinetry and panelling to create a room that felt logical, symmetrical and functional.

While the aesthetic is clearly Scandinavian, Roman didn't want it to be too 'on the nose', so brought in a rich mix of furniture, lighting and textiles. Most of the lights are from Woka Lamps in Vienna, while much of the furniture is by English makers such as George Smith and Alfred Newall, whose wife Tess also created the wallpaper for the entrance hall. The rugs are Swedish archival patterns that Commune recreated with Doris Leslie Blau, and there are iconic pieces by Finn Juhl, Poul Henningsen and Kaare Klint. All the paintings are Swedish, sourced from LIF and The Instant Daughter in New York. Rooting the home in its location are benches by George Maker of Sawyer Made in Pennsylvania, as well as other pieces from Hudson-based Chris Lehrecke and Black Creek Mercantile in upstate New York.

The dining room is wrapped in a jolly red-and-white gingham fabric from Classic Cloth, which serves as a bold declaration of intent for Roman's clients. 'Most people have expectations of what a New York apartment looks like,' he says. 'She was a bit of an outsider coming in, and she wanted people to walk in and see her personality, perhaps get to know her better.' The colour doesn't stop there, with Farrow & Ball's 'Inchyra Blue' defining the library. Commune uses a lot of Farrow & Ball paints in its Californian projects, but the colours are transformed in New York. 'It's the light,' explains Roman. 'That blue is pretty striking; it's almost like being ensconced in velvet.' It took time to persuade his client to agree to the colour – 'she was afraid of having a dark apartment' – but Roman argued that, as there are no views, just other buildings and rooftops, everything should turn inward. 'I wanted to make it all hug you,' he says. A little slice of Scandinavia in the Big Apple, this home certainly has hygge energy, but without any of the twee connotations. communedesign.com; elizabethroberts.com ►



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Study While other areas are painted in subtle shades of grey and feel more open, 'you walk in and everything contracts, you're more in a little womb', says Roman. The most striking element is the walls and woodwork painted in the rich, deep 'Inchyra Blue' by Farrow & Ball. In this cosy corner, Frits Henningsen's 'Signature' chair for Carl Hansen is flanked by a mahogany side table by Locke Bell from Hostler Burrows. The custom Swedish flatweave rug is by Doris Leslie Blau

Guest bedroom In this space (pictured above) Mauny's 'Crenelin' wallcovering creates a similar colour hit, combined with a wardrobe painted in Farrow & Ball's 'India Yellow'. The custom sofa bed is upholstered in Josef Frank's 'Primavera' ➤



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Bathroom Custom wall tiles in a mix of 'Dew' and 'Cashmere' glazes and basketweave floor mosaic tiles are by Red Rock Tileworks. The 'Starlet Flair' oval bathtub is from Bette, with Barber Wilsons' 'Regent' taps in brass.

Entry A vase by Sven Wejsfelt, vintage bronze German bowl and 1930s lamp by Just Andersen sit on a 1940s walnut sideboard by Ole Wanscher. The 'Herbarium Wildflower' wallpaper is by Tess Newall, the blue-leather mirror is by Otto Schulz and the Scandinavian flatweave rug is by Doris Leslie Blau.

Bedroom An 'Agnes' lamp by Victoria Morris Pottery sits on a 'Bobbin' side table by Alfred Newall next to the bed, which is dressed in a vintage American quilt from Paula Rubenstein. The custom Swedish flatweave rug – its design inspired by the work of mid-century Swedish designer Berit Koenig – is by Doris Leslie Blau. The wallpaper is Mauny's 'Semis Paillettes'.

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