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# Minimalist in Manhattan

ON PARK AVENUE, A SUBTLE INTERIOR  
COMES INTO THE LIGHT

Architecture and Interior Design by Hariri & Hariri  
Text by Judith Thurman/Photography by Paul Warchol



"The owners asked us to build a place that was not dependent on art but in which the architecture itself was art," architect Gisue Hariri, of Hariri & Hariri, says of the Park Avenue apartment she designed with her sister Mojgan. LEFT: Shimmering materials, such as the gold mosaic tiles of the fireplace and the glass wall, add interest to the spare space. Holly Hunt sofa, chairs and low table. Odegard carpet. ABOVE: The entrance gallery opens onto the living room, which displays a pair of sculptures by Jason Lamberth.



Recessed channels and reveals contribute to an illusion of buoyancy. “None of the planes quite intersect,” says Gisue Hariri (below right, with design team member Thierry Pfister). OPPOSITE: Sliding walls can join the dining room to the library/media room. Holly Hunt table and chairs. Odegard rug.

Materials and furnishings “offer a sense of luxury and refinement,” she says, “while the quiet composition of the layered space offers a stark and monastic experience.” ABOVE: In the kitchen, a marble work surface doubles as a dining area. Dennis Miller stools. Poliform cabinets. Thermador ovens.

If you free-associate to the image of a “Modernist master,” you will probably visualize, for starters, a man. He is posing with or without arty glasses in front of an iconic box. Like the building, he has something intimidating about him—a cerebral swagger. Now think again. Two of the leading Modernists in contemporary architecture are the Iranian-born, Cornell-educated sisters Gisue and Mojgan Hariri. Without being heretical (“We still revere Wright, Mies and Corbu,” Gisue Hariri says), their work is a synthesis of rigor and poetry. Volumes float; planes fold; walls billow; color and texture chafe the sparseness of the interiors. “And we respect the fact that real people don’t live abstractly.”

The firm’s latest project, an \$80 million development in Salzburg, Austria, is under construction. But in 2004 one of the Hariris’ smaller pebbles made

a huge splash: House 43, a residence commissioned by Richard Meier and the late Coco Brown as part of Houses at Sagaponac, an experimental community in East Hampton (see *Architectural Digest*, November 2002). They were the first of the all-star architects who participated in the development to see their design realized.

The house was widely published and admired, and when a New York media executive saw the pictures, “I flipped out,” he says, “got the Hariris’ number, called cold, and Gisue answered.” Her warmth disarmed him—he was expecting a diva. He and his wife were bidding on a prewar Park Avenue apartment, and they asked her for a candid opinion of its potential. To a civilian eye, it looked like a pedestrian two-bedroom co-op with dark woodwork, a clutter of low-browed doorways with a postwar profile and the décor of a B&B in



## The décor illustrates Hariri's assertion that "an extroverted space can be meditative."

the Catskills. "I love it; buy it!" she urged them without hesitation.

A mad person is someone who sees what isn't there. A visionary is someone who sees what isn't there yet. Hariri saw glorious light from two exposures and a rare opportunity for what she calls holistic design—"orchestrating the whole symphony of architecture, furnishings and construction." The couple were willing to give the firm carte blanche for a gut renovation, but they also contributed, Hariri says, "important bits of the melody." It was their idea to retain the apartment's classic footprint, with a gallery bisecting the bedroom wing and the public spaces. This gesture toward the past appealed to the architects, whose

experience in "negotiating two drastically different cultures" has given them a healthy respect for the need both to jettison baggage and to preserve continuity.

Artfully finessed transitions are, in fact, one of the firm's signatures. "We love Modernist transparency," Gisue Hariri says, "but we also love the way that Islamic architecture plays with veiling and separation." Fixed or sliding translucent walls create an ethereal sense of passage and definition without forming solid barriers to the light. The once murky gallery, now stark white, has a faintly tinted limestone floor with the shimmer of sea glass. It is punctuated, like a loggia, with floor-to-ceiling doorways in *wenge* that act as sculptural gateways to the bedrooms beyond. Before the renovation, the public rooms were a palatial vacuum. The slack has disappeared, pleated into a luminous reception suite with a library/media room at one end and a living room at the other. They bracket an interior dining room that receives daylight through glass partitions.

The equilibrium between bold gestures and subtle, almost subliminal, architectural detail is carried through in the décor, which illustrates Hariri's assertion that "an extroverted space can be meditative." A graphic palette and opulent materials are chastened by monastic restraint. The living room is furnished with an overscale low table and sofas, and the "object fireplace"—one of their folded planes—evokes the profile of a Greek meander. Its pavé surface of handmade golden mosaic tiles refers abstractly to the glow of firelight.

The disorder of family life in a space this pure registers like a sonic boom, but the clients are undaunted, and the husband is an even more devout Minimalist than his architects. "I would have gone further," he admits: "no light fixtures or door hinges." ("The less you do, the more it costs," his wife teases him.) But he pays them the supreme compliment of disagreeing with their impulse to hang things on his walls. "Why do I need works of art," he asks, "when I'm living in one?" □

TOP: For the floor plan, "we juxtaposed the traditional classical layout of a prewar apartment with the openness of Modernism," Hariri says. ABOVE: A Hans Wegner chair is in the library/media room, which has cabinets in a dark *wenge* that was used throughout the interiors to achieve contrast. OPPOSITE: A "Zen-like" floating bed—the firm's own design—occupies the center of the master bedroom. The photograph is by Joseph La Piana. Stark carpet.

