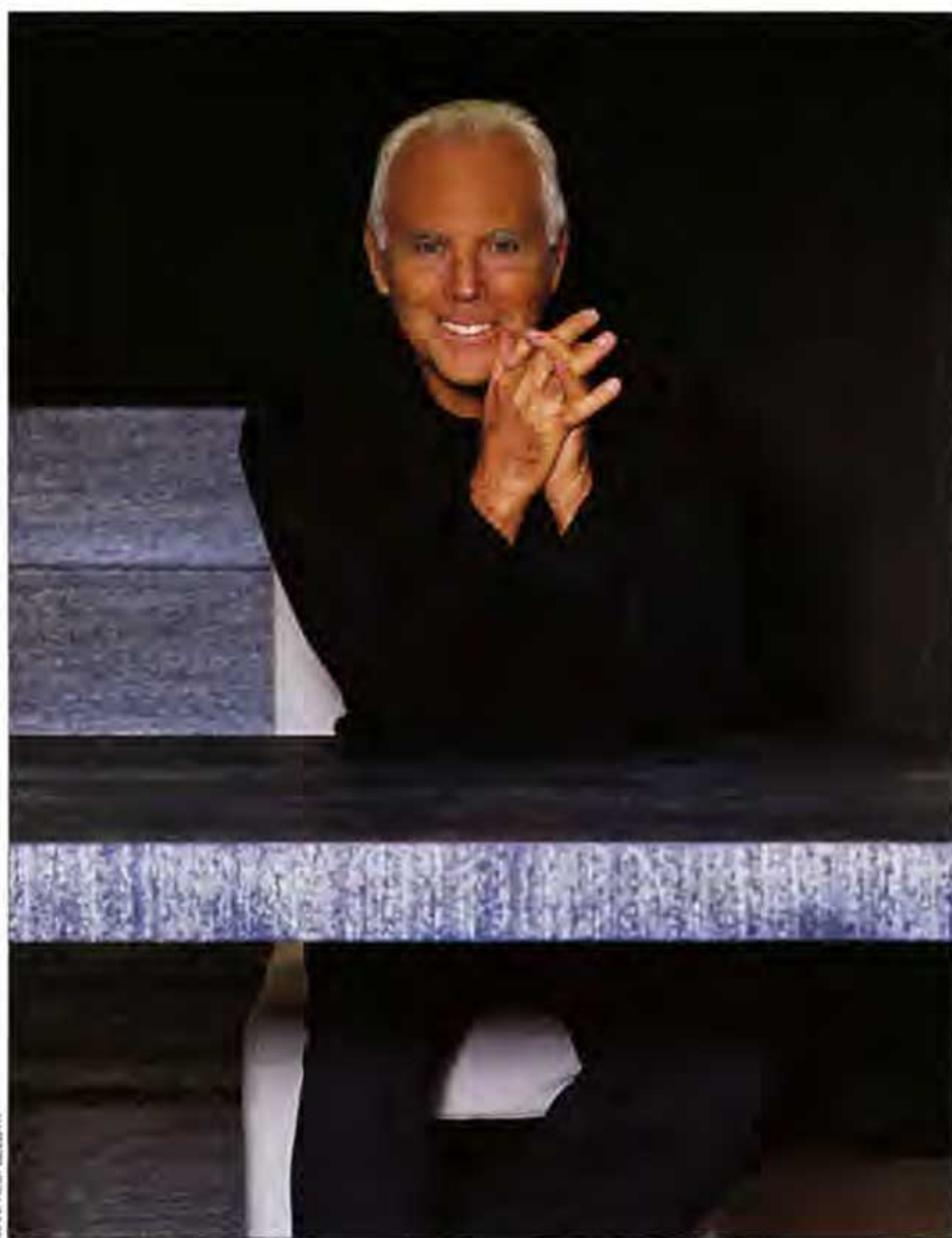


A year or so before he decided to create Armani Casa, the recently launched line of furniture, linens and household accessories that extends his reach into the home, Giorgio Armani purchased an apartment in New York. He had been looking for a pied-à-terre—nothing too big or too burdensome, not a lavish stage set for entertaining, but a place where he and members of his extended family could come for the occasional holiday. “The most important thing,” he explains, “was to escape the hotel life. I didn’t want to feel like a tourist or a businessman.” He also needed a stopover en route from his base in Milan to points south and west—“a trampoline for my vacations in the Caribbean,” he says.

What he found was a 3,500-square-foot penthouse on



“When I design clothes, I don’t want to load a woman down with ribbons and brooches,” says fashion designer Giorgio Armani (left), who employed a similar concept for the interiors of his New York apartment. “It’s the same in the home. I don’t want to fill the space.”

OPPOSITE: Throughout the apartment, Armani used furnishings and fabrics from his Armani Casa collection, such as the living room’s silk slipper chair and bronze table lamp. The 1920s cast-iron table in the entrance hall, beyond, holds a brass lamp by Hinson & Company.

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST VISITS

Giorgio Armani

LESS IS ENOUGH FOR THE DESIGNER’S PIED-A-TERRE

Text by Holly Brubach/Photography by Durston Saylor

Central Park West. Armani was particularly struck by the apartment’s sense of spaciousness, which is out of all proportion to its dimensions, thanks to long, uninterrupted sight lines and large windows facing in all directions; the surrounding 3,200-square-foot terrace nearly doubles the area. As it turned out, this aerie served as a laboratory of sorts for the principles that would become the basis of the Armani Casa style. Streamlined and unpretentious, with a skillful mix of new and old, the end result is the expression of a careful-

ly considered manifesto on the way we live now and the objects with which we surround ourselves.

Armani set to work renovating the space and furnishing it with the help of Thomas O’Brien, of New York-based Aero Studios. If the goal in designing any interior space is to create an atmosphere, then Armani’s in this case was to make a place that would be relaxed, casual and, above all, comfortable, rather than proper or “correct,” achieved through the use of materials he characterizes as “substantial” as

opposed to overtly luxurious.

The rooms now flow in sequence with a remarkable seamlessness, thanks to the use of a rigorously restricted selection of materials deployed throughout the apartment. The doors are framed in dark wood, echoing the window frames; the dark wood floor is continuous, even in the kitchen and the baths. Parchment-colored linen covering the walls in the entrance hall is repeated in the kitchen, lacquered, on the face of the cabinet doors. Parchment linen draperies line the windows; in the liv-

ing room, the same fabric covers the sofa and chairs.

“Just a few elements, well distributed, make the apartment feel larger,” Armani says. He believes that the conventional approach—of subdividing the area into different zones, each decorated in a different color, in a different style—inevitably diminishes the sense of space. Instead, he chose “to create a whole, without borders or ‘cracks’ that would limit the perspective.”

In organizing this—or, indeed, any—space, the lighting takes precedence, in Ar-





mani's opinion. "Light is responsible for 50 percent of the effect," he declares. "The architecture comes after." The living room and master bedroom, with their walls of windows, are flooded with natural light. In the baths, each outfitted with custom lighting built into the stainless-steel casing around the mirrors, the objective was to illuminate the face from all sides.

Working in fashion has made Armani an expert in the science of flattery, the optical illusions that present people at their best. "Overhead lighting mars the face. Also the clothes," he says. "You see all the wrinkles. It's important to diffuse the light."

For those familiar with Armani's clothing and accessories, Armani Casa proves to be an extension of the philosophy he pioneered, consistent with the fluid silhouettes, intelligence and confidence that have characterized his fashion. Hailed as a prophet of minimalism, he now finds his signature style misinterpreted by the trend spotters, who proclaim that minimalism is dead.

People grew tired of minimalism, he explains, because it was taken to the extreme, until it "flattened" everything and lost sight of what it means to be human. Predictably, then, the pendulum is now swinging in the other direction, as designers and decorators begin to pile on the ornamentation that has been absent for the past decade. But the extremes are boring, Armani contends. He

The home collection, which includes the living room's sofa and puckered-silk pillows, was "designed for the body's comfort," says Armani. On the lacquered-oak-and-bamboo low table is a ceramic centerpiece of his design. "An object furnishes a table," he adds.



strives instead for an equilibrium between old and new, expensive and inexpensive, as demonstrated by the subtle contrasts evident in this apartment. "It's the anachronisms that create interest," he says.

Interspersed among selections from the Armani Casa line are various vintage pieces—a 1940s desk by Edward Wormley for Dunbar, a cast-iron machinist's table from

the 1920s, a 1940s tubular-steel-and-linen armchair by André Sornay, a pair of antique Japanese lanterns ("When you add an ethnic element, it brings warmth," he says). The carpeting is sisal, a low-cost classic.

"I've removed the superfluous details," Armani says of his role in conceiving products for the home, as well as in designing fashion. "Besides," he continues, "this

Armani's goal was to make a place that would be relaxed, casual and, above all, comfortable.

ABOVE: The pared-down design continues in an area of the living room, where a set of three linen poufs and a club chair, both by Armani, join a 1940s leather stool. "The room has a southern exposure, allowing the light that streams in to become part of the décor," he says.

OPPOSITE: The Armani Casa furniture includes woods "that don't occur in nature," like the dining table's grooved and painted mahogany surface. The linen-covered chairs, table settings, wine goblets, cube candles and sanded vase are all from the home collection.









The extremes are boring, Armani contends. He strives instead for an equilibrium between old and new, expensive and inexpensive.

OPPOSITE: A 1940s tubular-steel chair by André Sornay is paired with a 1930s drafting table in the guest room. "I like to combine early-modern pieces with complementary contemporary ones," says the designer.

ABOVE: The terrace, which overlooks Central Park, "is a nice place to have breakfast, because of the unrestricted view—no nearby skyscrapers," says Armani. "I plan on planting out here in the spring."

apartment doesn't require much—with the windows, the sunlight, the views, it's already practically furnished."

The Armani style was born in Milan, and though it may in many respects seem quintessentially Milanese, it plays surprisingly well in other cities: Armani Casa now has outposts in New York, Paris and Los Angeles. Armani attributes its international relevance to the fact

that it is founded not on superficial gestures but on an attitude, a sensibility, a way of life, shared by people scattered all over the world. They want décor that doesn't make demands on their lives, that isn't too conscious of itself and doesn't take itself too seriously. Not inclined to make big design statements, they look to Armani for his highly personal brand of understatement. □