



The High Life A sophisticated aerie in the middle of midtown.

By Pilar Viladas Photographs by Thibault Jeanson

Thomas O'Brien knows a thing or two about fabulous rooms. The designer's six-year-old firm, Aero Studios, has decorated houses for Ralph Lauren (a former employer), and designed commercial interiors for Giorgio Armani, the restaurateur Ken Auletta and the upscale bath store Watersworks, to name a few A-list clients. But the room O'Brien waxes most rhapsodic about these days is his own living room — a glamorous, double-height space on the 17th floor of a prewar midtown apartment building.

O'Brien vividly recalls his real-estate coup de foudre. Having first poked around the apartment's one small bedroom, tiny kitchen and dark hallways, O'Brien was amazed by the living room, which was bathed in gentle north light from a pair of tall, slender casement windows. "I walked into this incredibly beautiful space," he says, "and I thought that nothing bad could happen to me here." (The apartment's terrace and fireplace didn't hurt, either.)

The rooms, now thoroughly renovated, are decorated in O'Brien's signature mix. His disciplined eye for clean lines and rich but neutral colors, as well as his intuitive sense of scale, allow him to pair an 18th-century chair with a 20th-century table for an undeniably modern result. Yet, O'Brien notes, the spaces "feel warm and inviting." So much so, in fact, that the designer vows, "I'll never move again."



The living room, left, is 10½ feet high and painted a pale, warm gray. The furniture is eclectic, from the Mission chair that O'Brien found when he was a student, to his updated version of a 1920's Scottish club chair, to the polished aluminum-and-walnut dining table that he designed himself. The living room opens onto a small terrace, opposite page, that offers views toward both the East and Hudson rivers.



At the other end of the living room, opposite page, a vintage cream leather sofa, a turn-of-the-century American armchair and another dining table designed by O'Brien offer a neutral counterpoint to a large abstract painting by Nancy Lorenz and an 18th-century English painted chair. In the bedroom, right, an 18th-century American cupboard is home to an English lamp made from a coffee urn, a landscape painting and a vase by Jonathan Adler. O'Brien's gift for the eloquent still life is apparent here as well as in the living room, above left and center. The newly renovated kitchen, above right, has a 1930's look.

