

TRADITIONAL HOME.

September 2003

the power of pink
you'll love the warmth it brings to your rooms

the glamour
of a dressing table

posh picks for the
pampered pooch

art of the Old West:
discover it, collect it





Friendly Refinement

Eric Cohler's elegant renovation of a

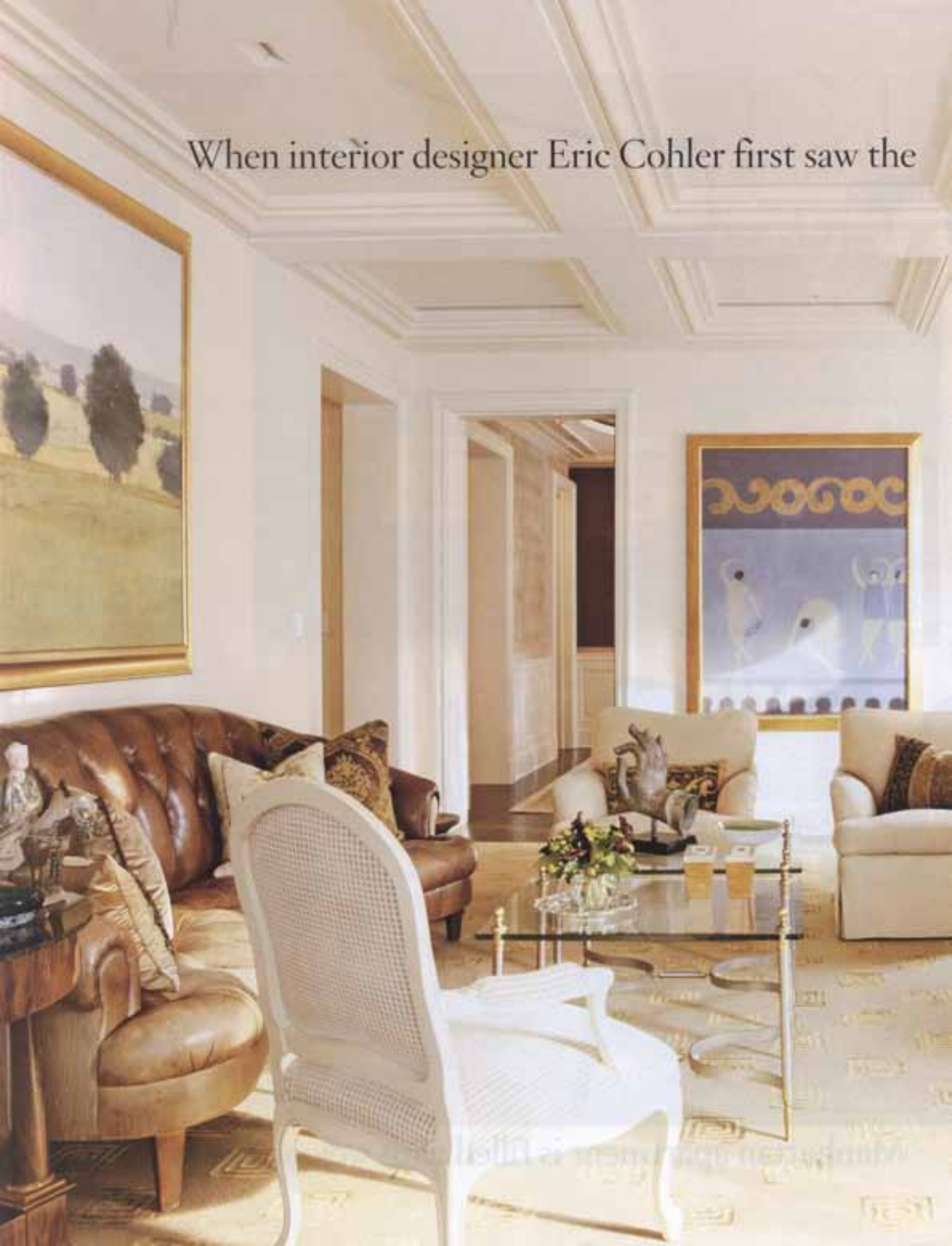
BY PAMELA J. WILSON PHOTOGRAPHY BY PIETER ESTERSONH PRODUCED BY KRISKA ROSSBUND



The dining room beckons with its elegant domed ceiling, a stunning 1920s Murano glass chandelier, upholstered walls, and an interplay of traditional and contemporary artworks. The formality of the Biedermeier chairs is tempered by the fabric on the seats—silk shot through with twine.

Manhattan apartment is filled with welcoming warmth.

When interior designer Eric Cohler first saw the



apartment his clients were thinking of buying, the word

that came to mind was "dreadful." He didn't disparage the building itself (a 1920s classic) or its location (Manhattan's Upper East Side), nor did he find fault with the apartment's 2,800-square-foot size. What dismayed Cohler was the outdated decor ("Blocked wallpaper everywhere"), the chopped-up, claustrophobic floor plan, and the misguided late-'50s modernizations. "To be livable for today, the place needed to be completely gutted," he relates.

Young marrieds Lou and Blair Rosenfeld fully agreed with Cohler's assessment and understood that it would be at least a year before the apartment was ready for habitation. Like Cohler himself, the Rosenfelds are perfectionists and sticklers for detail, and they knew a top-notch renovation would take time.

Cohler, who holds a master's degree in historic preservation from Columbia University, has great respect for the past, but only when it's worthy of respect. "Architecturally, the Rosenfelds' apartment wasn't worth preserving. It needed to be dignified, to be given a new identity," the designer notes.

To get the redo going, every wall in the eight-room apartment was torn down and every piece of ugly, glued-down parquet tile ripped up. During the dismantling, a nice discovery was made. "Someone, probably in an attempt to modernize in the 1950s, had put up a false ceiling. When we removed the ceiling, the apartment instantly gained two feet in stature," Cohler says.

The reclaiming of this previously hidden overhead space gave rise, in more ways than one, to some fabulous design ideas. In

Left: The renovated living room is proof that a formal setting need not be straitlaced or overly serious. Here, all it took was a lighthearted painting of dancers onstage to put the room at ease. **Below:** Designer Cohler prefers the see-through glass cocktail tables to "one big blob of wood." The bronze lamps are 1950s American.





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the dining room, for instance, Cohler was able to forgo a standard flat ceiling and create a highly dramatic domed effect. Covered in 22-karat white gold leaf and embraced by pristine white woodwork, the dome's beauty is rivaled only by an exquisite 1920s Murano glass chandelier and the elegant mahogany table and Biedermeier chairs beneath it.

The Rosenfelds, who moved into their completed apartment about 18 months ago, adore Cohler's design for the dining room—not just the spectacular ceiling, but the other classic architectural details as seen in the wainscoting, the moldings, and the Greek key motif that frames walls upholstered in silk velvet. “We love to entertain, and this room, even though it's formal, is also very warm and inviting,” says Blair. “We had 18 people here for Passover this year, and everyone felt very comfortable.”

Blair and Lou give top priority to the comfort of family and friends, especially now that 9-month-old Olivia, their first child, is part of the scene. “We plan to raise a family here, so it's important that our home be very livable, not just a showplace,” says Blair. “Eric designed the apartment, both architecturally and decoratively, with this in mind, and now when we have friends over, we encourage them to bring their children along.”

Gatherings of all kinds take place in the living room, an open, light-drenched space that Blair describes as “formal and traditional with touches of contemporary flair.” Many of the furnishings, including the welcoming curved leather sofa, the pair of classic Lawton lounge chairs, and the glass-topped cocktail tables, came from the couple's previous apartment.

“The past,” says Cohler, “is prologue to the present,” and in the Rosenfelds' home, the present—far from trendy—gladly accommodates historical reference points. One such reference is the living room's new coffered ceiling, an architectural classic if ever there was one. The ceiling brings importance to the room, but painted white, it is not overly imposing. Low-wattage lights fitted into the coffers cast an ethereal, romantic glow at night.

Both Rosenfelds are passionate about art, and before they were married they would often take walks on Saturday mornings, peering into galleries along the way. Today they continue to enjoy these outings, only now it's with baby Olivia and their Wheaten terrier, Roger, in tow.

A favorite artist is the late Doris Lee, and they now own two of her works. One, an abstract, is a striking and colorful presence against the dining room's neutral walls. The other—depicting stylized dancers on a stage—is a star attraction in the living room. Blair says she would love this painting in any setting, but she particularly likes it here, against crisp white walls, where it lends a sense of grace, movement, and contemporary verve

Left: Designed for a person who truly loves to cook and entertain—in this case Blair Rosenfeld—the kitchen offers every conceivable amenity, including professional-grade appliances, high-performance, high-style limestone countertops and floor, and not one but two wine coolers, **top right**, for vins blancs and rosés.

Right: Interior designer Eric Cohler with Blair Rosenfeld and her baby, Olivia, on the enclosed terrace just off the kitchen.



home be livable, not just a showplace. —HOMEOWNER BLAIR ROSENFELD



to the space. The landscape painting above the leather sofa was found by chance on one of their Saturday morning walks. They were strolling in SoHo, spotted the painting in a window, and promptly went into the shop and bought it. "We didn't even know the artist's name. We just knew we wanted it," says Blair.

Along with her fondness for entertaining and collecting art, Blair loves to cook. For this reason, Cohler designed a chef's kitchen complete with heavy-duty, professional-grade appliances, a wet bar, and double wine coolers. The 15x25-foot cook's paradise features Jerusalem gold limestone floors, counters topped with unusually thick limestone, a small lounging area, and a casual dining spot furnished with antique Regency chairs.

The Rosenfelds head to their library for comfort and put-up-your-feet relaxation. Paneled in mahogany with ebony details, the room has a very 1930s French feel and is wonderfully warm and cozy. A flat-screen TV placed in the new built-in shelves is a big draw for the family and for friends' children who come to visit. As such, the white seating pieces could be problematic, but fortunately they're covered in sturdy washable cotton.

At the end of the day, Blair and Lou retreat to the ultimate comfort of their master suite. Located just steps away from the main living area, it seems a world apart. The bathroom is reminiscent of a European luxury hotel, and the bedroom itself is a sanctuary where the wall behind the headboard is upholstered in channeled silk (to muffle noise from the street below) and the bed is dressed in body-pampering linens.

In designing this room and, indeed, all the others, Cohler knew just how to please with a combination of refinement and friendliness. "Our tastes were a perfect match," says Blair. ■

Interior designer: Eric Cohler Project manager: Matthew Hartog

For more information, see the Reader's Resource on page 194.



Opposite: Part of the new master suite, the bathroom features Italian marble countertops, a floor tiled in limestone and mini mosaics, and woodwork that's a mix of real mahogany and a lesser wood painted to look like the real thing.

Left: The luxurious bed is embraced by mahogany screens fitted with antique mirrors. The bedside table is from an old Paris hotel.

Top: A vaulted-ceiling anteroom offers access to the bedroom, bath, and a dressing room.

Above: French Art Deco-style mahogany paneling with ebony detailing gives the library a stylish yet homey feel.