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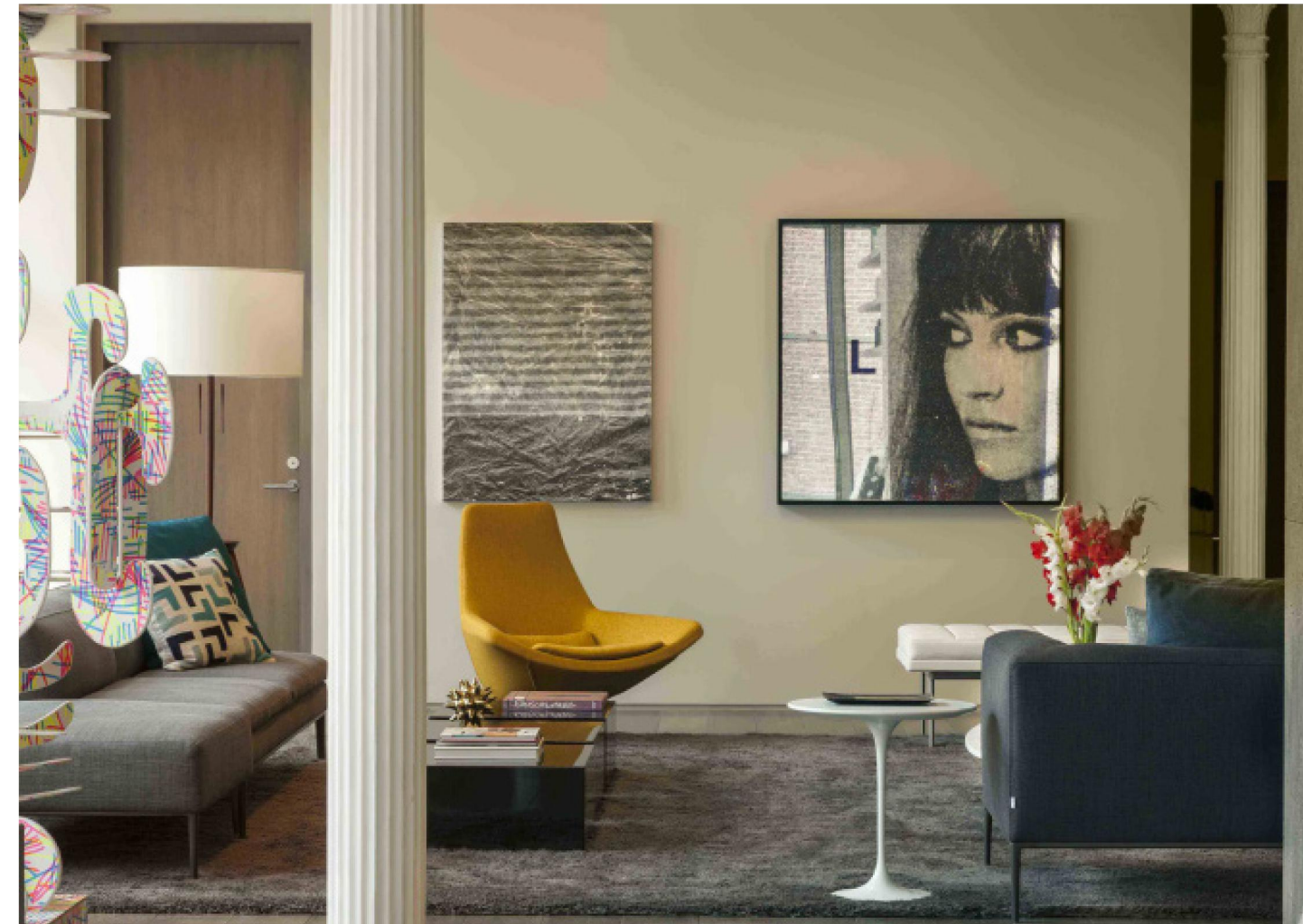
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SAMUEL L. JACKSON

THE OSCAR-NOMINATED ACTOR CONTINUES AN ELECTRIC 50-YEAR CAREER BY REPRISING THE ROLE OF ELIJAH PRICE IN M. NIGHT SHYAMALAN'S *GLASS*—A PART THAT DESCRIBES, HE EXPLAINS, THE DUALITY OF GOOD AND EVIL

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Design: A Love Story

HOW GLAMOROUS MINIMALISM MET ART
IN THIS BOND STREET LOFT

BY BROOKE BALTIMORE
INTERIOR PHOTOS BY DURSTON SAYLOR

Axis mundi,” an often spiritual concept with varying definitions depending upon its regional and cultural application, put simply, is the place where heavens connect with the earth. It has been represented by a mountain, a vine or tree, even a column of smoke or swirl of fire. For architect John Beckmann, founder and creative director of New York-based interior design firm Axis Mundi, the name was chosen for its at once psychological and philosophical meaning—what connects people to a residence.

“I thought it was a great name because people’s homes are a center for them,” he explained.

Beckmann began his design journey with studies in architecture and interior and industrial design at Parsons School of Design in Manhattan, ultimately graduating with a BFA in environmental design,

which led to working for a high-profile agency that gave him both the chops and vision to establish a firm of his own. Axis Mundi, created in 2004 and with offices in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, both designs and constructs retail spaces, residential buildings, and art installations—including the World Museum of Mining in Butte, Montana, Lockheed Martin’s X Lab (Advanced Technology Center) in Palo Alto, California, and New York’s own Whitney Downtown Museum. His honors include a grant from the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts (1998) and a McDowell Colony Fellowship (2010), and he is a visiting critic at Yale School of Architecture, Pratt Institute, and Parsons the New School for Design. Both he and his firm are driven and captivated by, as its site details, “the intersections between architecture, design, and contemporary art.”

This building, on Bond Street in lower Manhattan and completed in 1879, was occupied by the publishing firm D. Appleton & Co., and also housed at one time the American

Waltham Watch Company. A masterful “commercial palazzo in the French Second Empire mode,” according to New York City’s Historic Districts Council, “It is an excellent representative of that type of 19th-century architecture. Among its important features the mansard roof and the repetitive bay units, a characteristic feature of cast-iron architecture.” Designated a New York City landmark in 1979, it was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1982.

Beckmann wanted to preserve some of the historic elements of this unit’s 3,400-square-foot space, such as original cast iron columns. In most other respects, it was presented to the team by its owners (an art gallery director and a hedge fund manager) as a canvas upon which they wanted to create a contemporary home. The result is a large-windowed and airy space that presents two bedrooms, four bathrooms, a living room, lounge area, and library. Work required nine months to complete.

“The clients moved very fast and were decisive. They were great to work with, especially with one of the owners being an

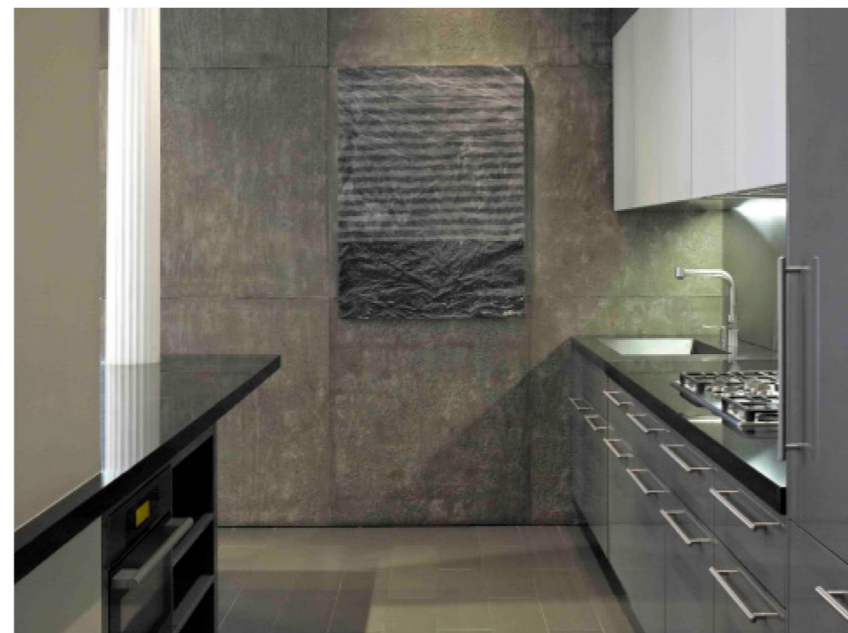


art director—so the creative aspect was understood,” said Beckmann. “The idea, when beginning the interior design process, was to create a low-slung glamorous minimalism feel.”

With that concept in mind, Beckmann and his design associate, Nick Messerlian, began, as the former explained, “by looking for carpets to set the palette in the space. It’s difficult to work backward. Once the carpet is complete, we use those colors to work from and the rest is easy to figure out.”

One Axis Mundi’s signature is to add pops of color within its work. This is seen throughout the space—in a vibrant yellow leather swivel chair in the living room, in splashes of turquoise velvet, patterned accent pillows along plush gray-toned couches, and in the red accent chair in the master bedroom. Outside of these contrasting touches, the loft is predominantly grayscale, which allowed the owners’ extensive art collection to shine. The dining room hosts a 12-foot-long dark wooden table, with dual-toned leather chairs offset by a large graffiti painting by artist Eddie Martinez. There is ample additional work by other young and/or emerging artists, such as Aaron Curry, Adam Pendleton, and Jung Lee.

Another Axis Mundi specialty is combining media in projects (“We’re not afraid of using color and mixing textures; otherwise the space becomes too monochrome,” Beckmann explained). This is consistent with,



as the company’s mission statement further explains, “being provocateurs and challenging assumptions.” The mingled use of leather, marble, fur, mohair, and warm woods might seem an incomprehensible puzzle as a list, but the firm managed to makes them at once declarative and integrative.

In order to not overwhelm owners with a myriad of furniture options, Beckmann and Messerlian keep a short list of designers they have strong relationships with, such as B&B Italia, Glas

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Italia, Flexform (Antonio Citterio x Flexform collection), and Stepevi.

“Our job is to edit what is out there...to be a curator,” said Beckman. “A lot of people may bring someone to 50 showrooms to sit on sofas; I present from the beginning four or five pieces in order to take away extra work for clients.”

Some designers, he added, think of rooms as existing within structured themes, but Beckman endeavors to not think in that manner, preferring to look at everything as pieces of art that need to converse. “I was interested in finding the juxtaposition in different pieces—from the artwork the owners brought to the design elements I wanted to include,” he said, making particular mention of the stunning hanging light fixture over the dining room table and the polished metal Bocci Cluster chandeliers in the master bedroom.

“Our ideal clients are people who collect art,” the designer added, “because they kind of *get it*.”

Currently, the firm is working on the 94th floor of 432 Park Avenue, a residential skyscraper in Manhattan with a completion date slated for spring of this year (see “You See Forever,” a July-August 2018 INDUSTRY story for a profile of another residence there), and also on a home on the 91st floor of the third tallest building in Chicago—a project of no less than 6,000 square feet. ■

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