

interiors





METRO PICTURES

INTERIOR DESIGN: AXIS MUNDI
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To art collectors, provenance is everything. So even though they weren't consciously seeking an apartment with a storied past when they went real-estate shopping, the collecting couple who purchased a loft in New York's NoHo district were pleased to discover the cast-iron building housing it embodied a wealth of impressive attributions. Designed in the 1870s by Stephen Decatur Hatch, whose commercial buildings are ubiquitous throughout lower Manhattan, it first accommodated a manufactory of watch cases, then D. Appleton & Company, publisher of, among other things, Charles Darwin's autobiography, Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* and the memoirs of William Tecumseh Sherman.

The building was landmarked in 1979 before being converted into residences in 1987. The particular unit they bought came with a bit more recent provenance: It had been handsomely renovated by the architects at Nemaworkshop for Mike Rutherford, a guitarist and songwriter for the group Genesis, who lived in it just a couple of nights before deciding his tour schedule wouldn't permit him to enjoy it. Along came Michael Berkley, managing director of a large hedge fund, and his girlfriend, Karine Haimo, a director at the prominent Chelsea art gallery Metro Pictures. They were so instantly taken with it, recalls Berkley, "we didn't do much at all aside from repainting and removing some wallpaper." Already *in situ* were original cast-iron columns, a concrete feature wall and a master bath enveloped in hot-rolled steel that sported Duravit bath fixtures.

But they needed help making it a more livable space, so they called on John Beckmann of Axis Mundi Design. Berkley and Haimo were just starting to assemble their art collection and liked the way the firm's clean modern interiors frequently provided pitch-perfect foils for contemporary art. "We're generally drawn to abstraction and younger emerging artists, most under forty," observes Berkley. (They are not rigid about their criteria, however, and they hung two *Seascapes* photographs by Hiroshi Sugimoto in the master bath.)

"We wanted the emphasis to be on the art, not the furnishings," Berkley says, "so large pieces of furniture had to be subdued and minimal. And we wanted John to play with textures—furs, leather, marble—so that some warmth would also come through, especially in the library." A cakewalk for Axis Mundi, which specializes in a comfortable brand of modernism that showcases natural materials and pops of color. "The biggest challenge," recalls Beckmann, "was achieving some sense of scale. It's a colossal space that could easily feel cavernous."





To address this, Beckmann and his associate Nick Messerlian devised a two-pronged approach. First, their floor plan broke the loft's 3,400 square feet into more intimate gathering areas. Second, they deployed generously proportioned furniture that filled out the space. To wit: a dining table from Holly Hunt that is almost 12 feet long holds its own within the vast square footage. Yet its substantial volume is tempered by chamfered edges and a clean, unadorned form that do not compete with a graffiti painting by Eddie Martinez. Ginger chairs from Poltrona Frau covered in an Hermès-like orange leather inject Axis Mundi's signature accents of bold color. "Otherwise, the place would look bland," Beckmann notes.

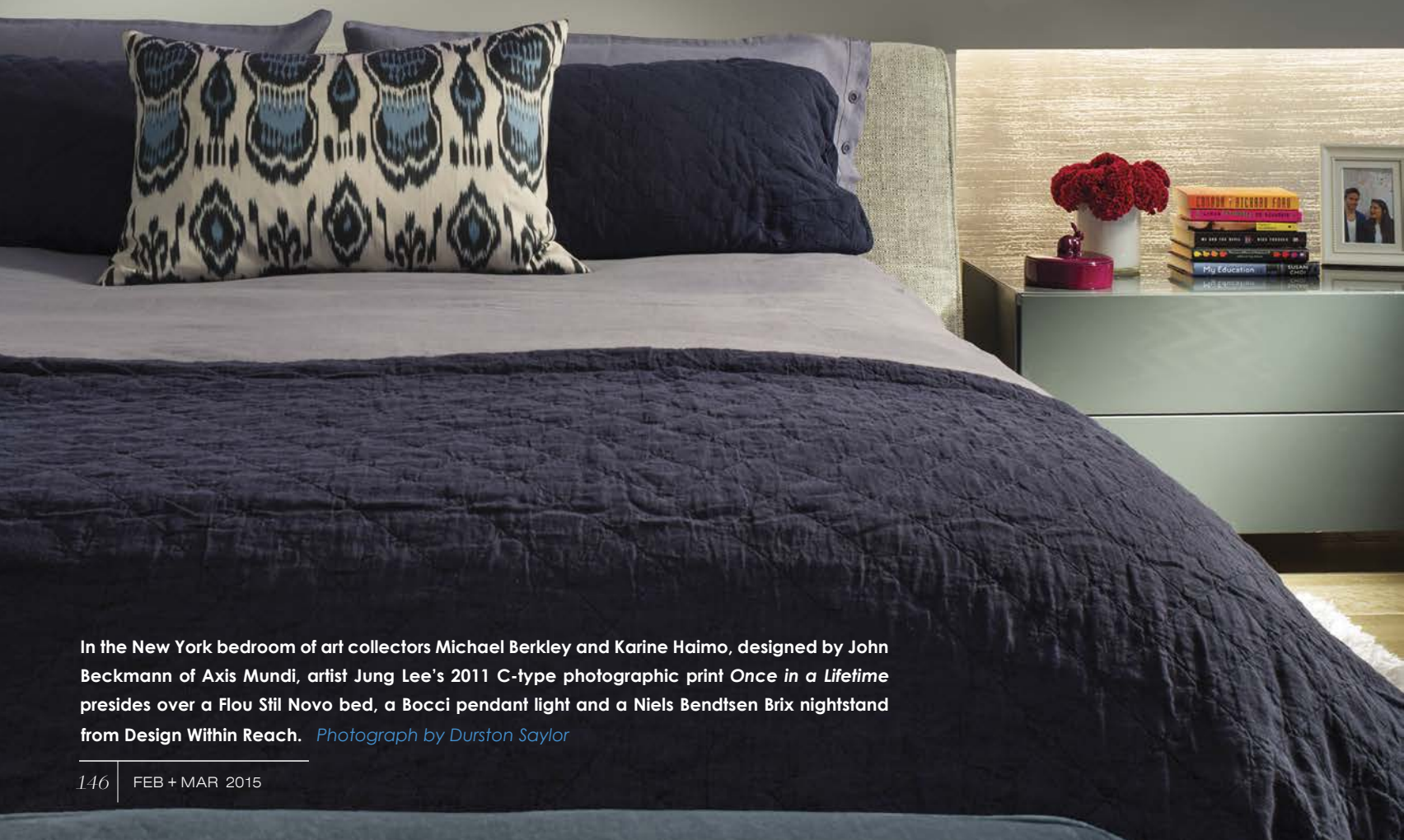
In the living room, Beckmann and Messerlian chose seating and coffee tables with a low profile as well: Michel sofas from B&B Italia that spread out laterally (allowing the vertical drama of a totemic sculpture by Aaron Curry to shine), a trio of Alice tables from Glas Italia and Paola Navone's marble Vietri table for Baxter (both through ddc). The sofas are clad in unpatterned—and thus visually unobtrusive—neutral gray tones. The Rug Company's mohair carpet is also gray. Here, punches of color come from turquoise pillows and a Metropolitan swivel from B&B in lively canary yellow leather. Given these subdued surroundings, Sam Moyer's gray abstraction and Adam Pendleton's enigmatic mirror painting of a woman take on a powerful graphic quality.





The adjacent library area exudes textural sensations—a sectional sofa in natural fabric, wood shelves and leather-wrapped coffee tables from Antonio Citterio's Groundpiece collection for Flexform, as well as the aptly named Touch-Me shag carpet from Stepevi and B&B Italia's J.J. rocking chair, which is covered in fuzzy Mongolian lamb fur. The textural mix carries over into the master bedroom, where Beckmann and Messerlian glammed up a rough scratch-coat wall with silvery metallic paint and added in slick finishes: high-gloss lacquer Brix nightstands by Niels Bendtsen for Design Within Reach and Bocci's polished metal Cluster chandeliers from Karkula. But an ikat pillow introduces a more grounded ethnic inflection, and natural linens on the Stil Novo bed from Flou likewise keep the design down to earth. The resulting tension from these contrasts heightens the impact of a surrealistic Jung Lee photograph above the bed. Taken together, the tactile modern interiors conjured by Axis Mundi enhance the experience of art that, in time, will likely acquire its own venerable provenance, too. ■

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In the New York bedroom of art collectors Michael Berkley and Karine Haimo, designed by John Beckmann of Axis Mundi, artist Jung Lee's 2011 C-type photographic print *Once in a Lifetime* presides over a Flou Still Novo bed, a Bocci pendant light and a Niels Bendtsen Brix nightstand from Design Within Reach. *Photograph by Durston Saylor*