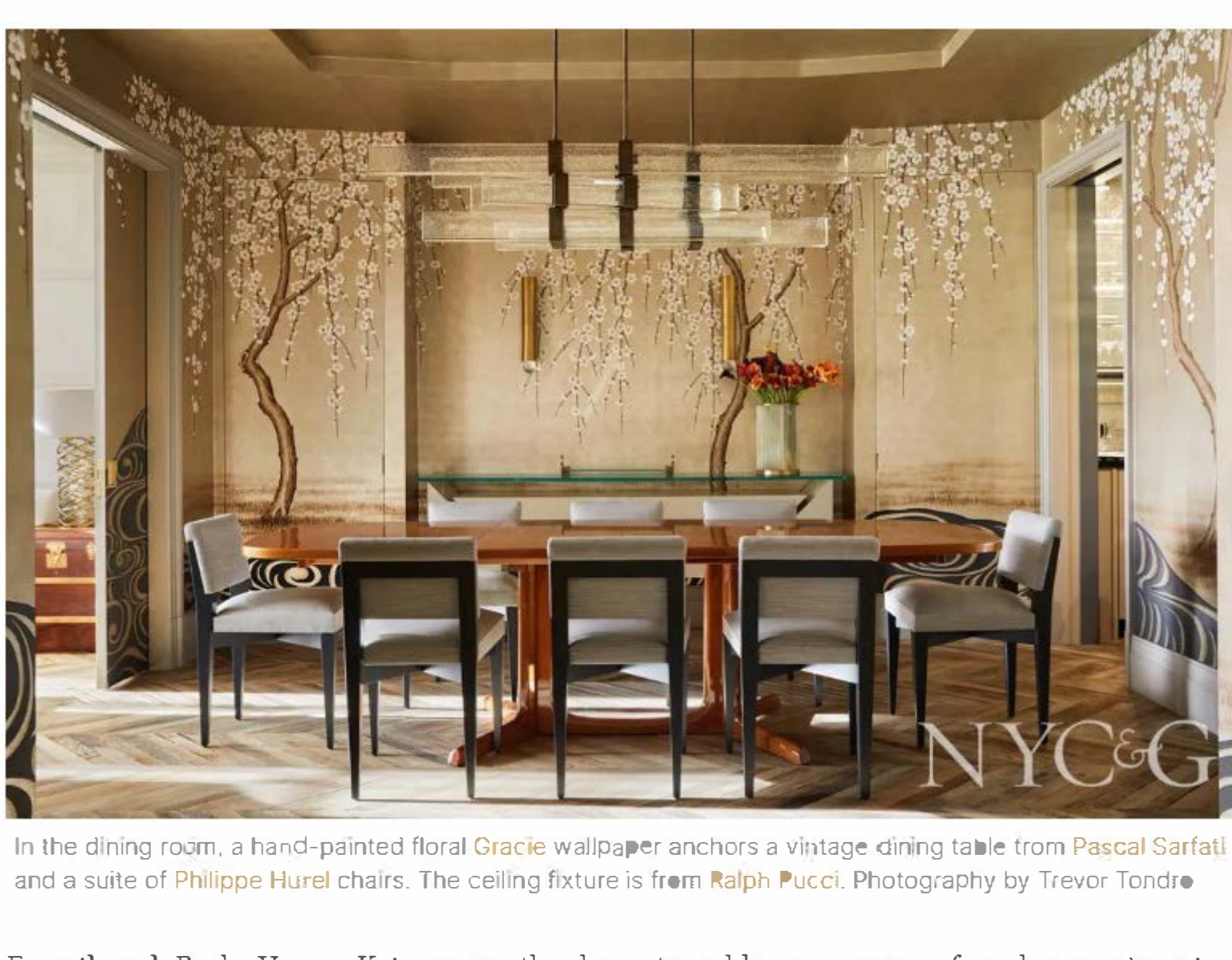


This Central Park West Sanctuary is Complete With Parisian Flair

In their apartment, a young New York City couple pay homage to the City of Light.

November 13, 2023 by David Masello | Photographs by Trevor Tondro



In the dining room, a hand-painted floral Gracie wallpaper anchors a vintage dining table from Pascal Sarfati and a suite of Philippe Hurel chairs. The ceiling fixture is from Ralph Pucci. Photography by Trevor Tondro

Even though Becka Vargus Katz can see the cherry trees bloom every year from her apartment overlooking Central Park, she has long wanted to live with the blossoms year-round. “Years ago, when my husband and I got married in Montreal,” she recounts, “we wanted cherry blossoms as our centerpieces, but there was a ban on importing them. So when Penny showed me a Gracie wallpaper with hand-painted cherry blossoms on it for the dining room, I knew it was the perfect pattern.”



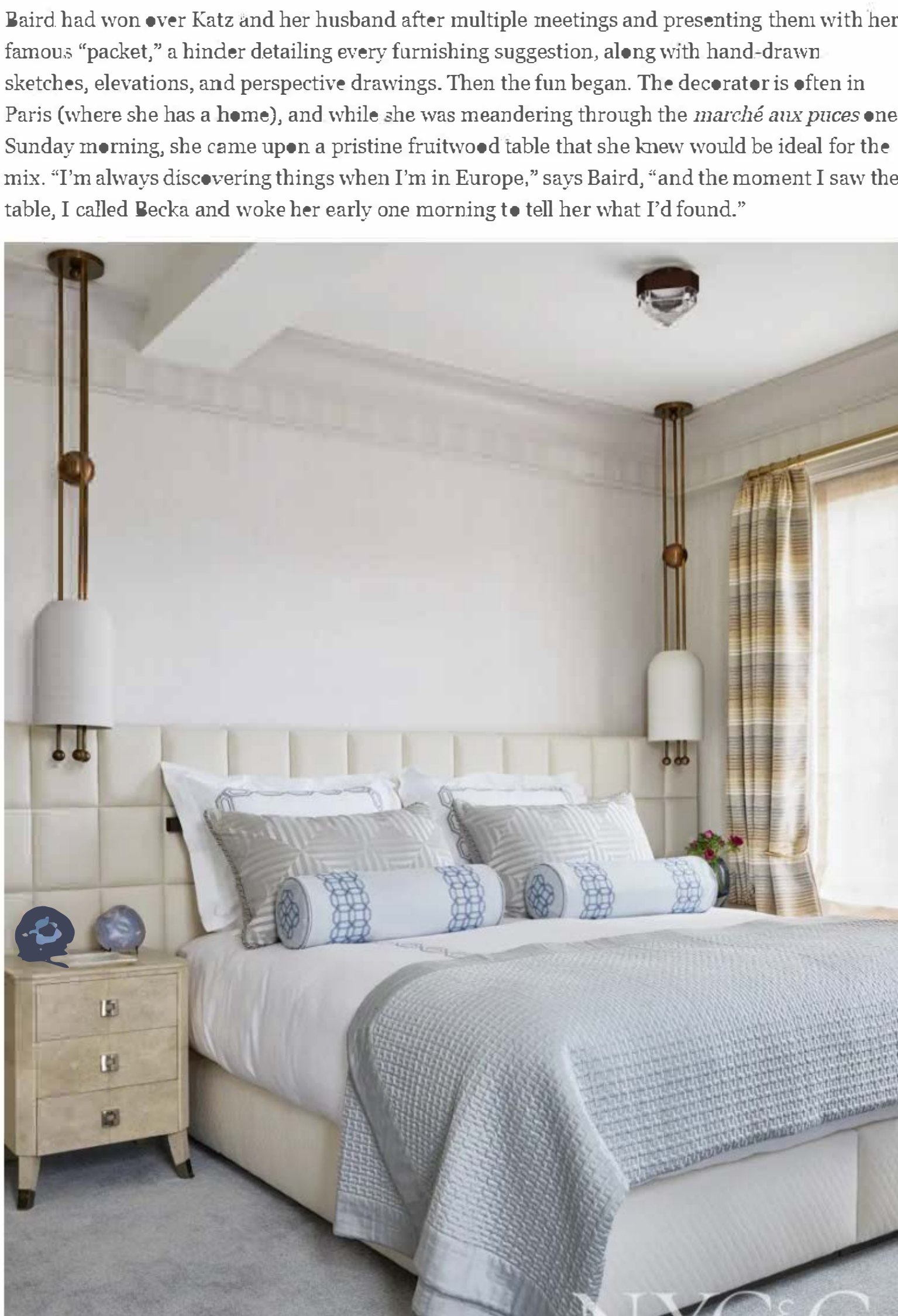
The kitchen features counters by Artistic Tile and cabinetry, a hood, and a range by Christopher Peacock. Photography by Trevor Tondro

“Penny” is Penny Drue Baird, the prolific New York-based interior designer who transformed the apartment for Katz and her husband and had proposed what she describes as a “slightly metallic wall covering with a Chinese tea-paper look to it. There’s something quietly groovy about it, especially with its black whorls at the bottom.” Although every inch of the sixth-floor Central Park West apartment embodies Baird’s aesthetic, the dining room assumes a decidedly special glow.



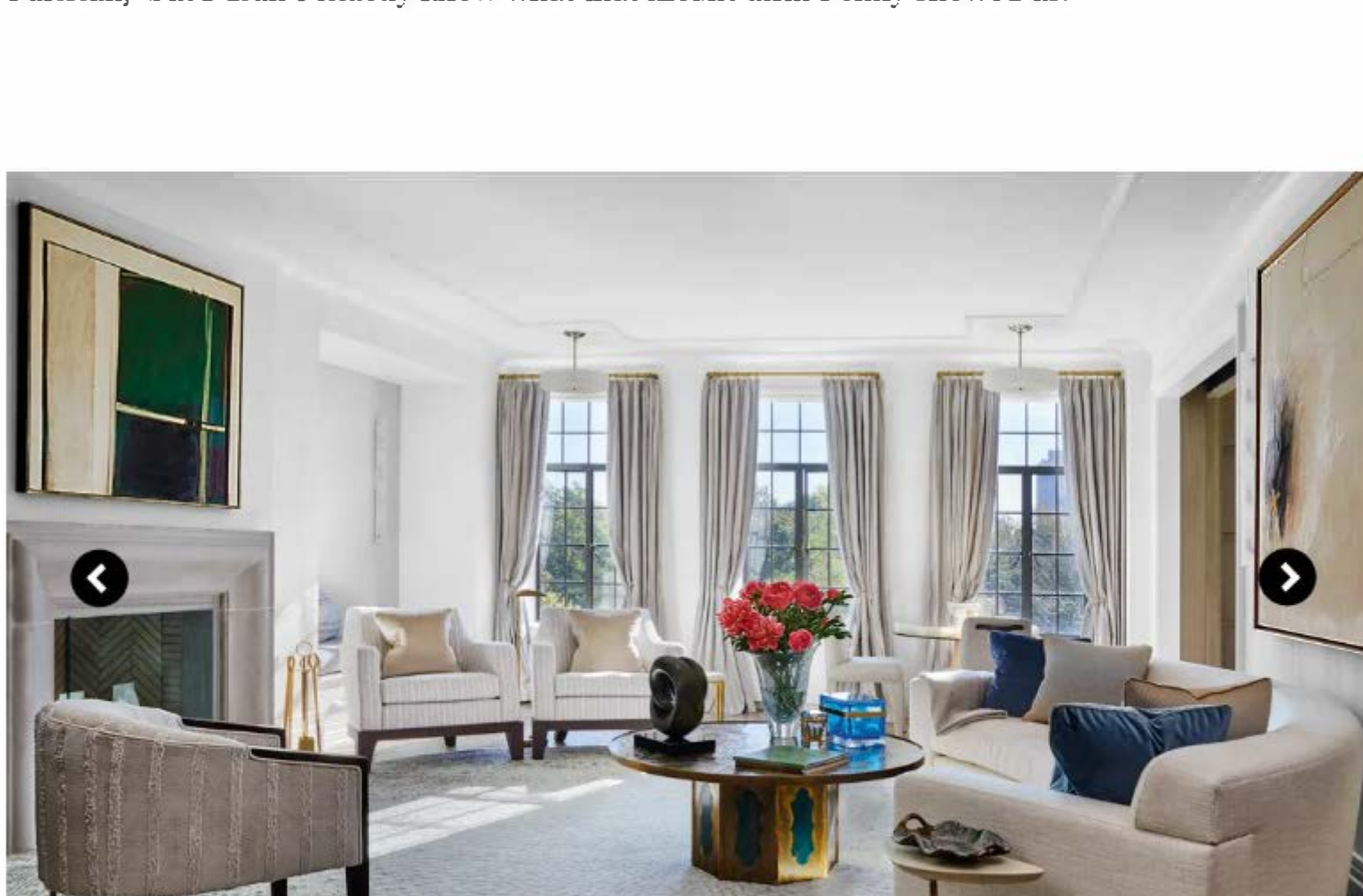
Maison Gattl rattan chairs flank a Morgik Metal table in the breakfast area. Photography by Trevor Tondro

Baird had won over Katz and her husband after multiple meetings and presenting them with her famous “packet,” a binder detailing every furnishing suggestion, along with hand-drawn sketches, elevations, and perspective drawings. Then the fun began. The decorator is often in Paris (where she has a home), and while she was wandering through the *marché aux puces* one Sunday morning, she came upon a pristine fruitwood table that she knew would be ideal for the mix. “I’m always discovering things when I’m in Europe,” says Baird, “and the moment I saw the table, I called Becka and woke her early one morning to tell her what I’d found.”



The custom bed and sofa in the primary bedroom are by Bespoke by Luigi Gentile. Photography by Trevor Tondro

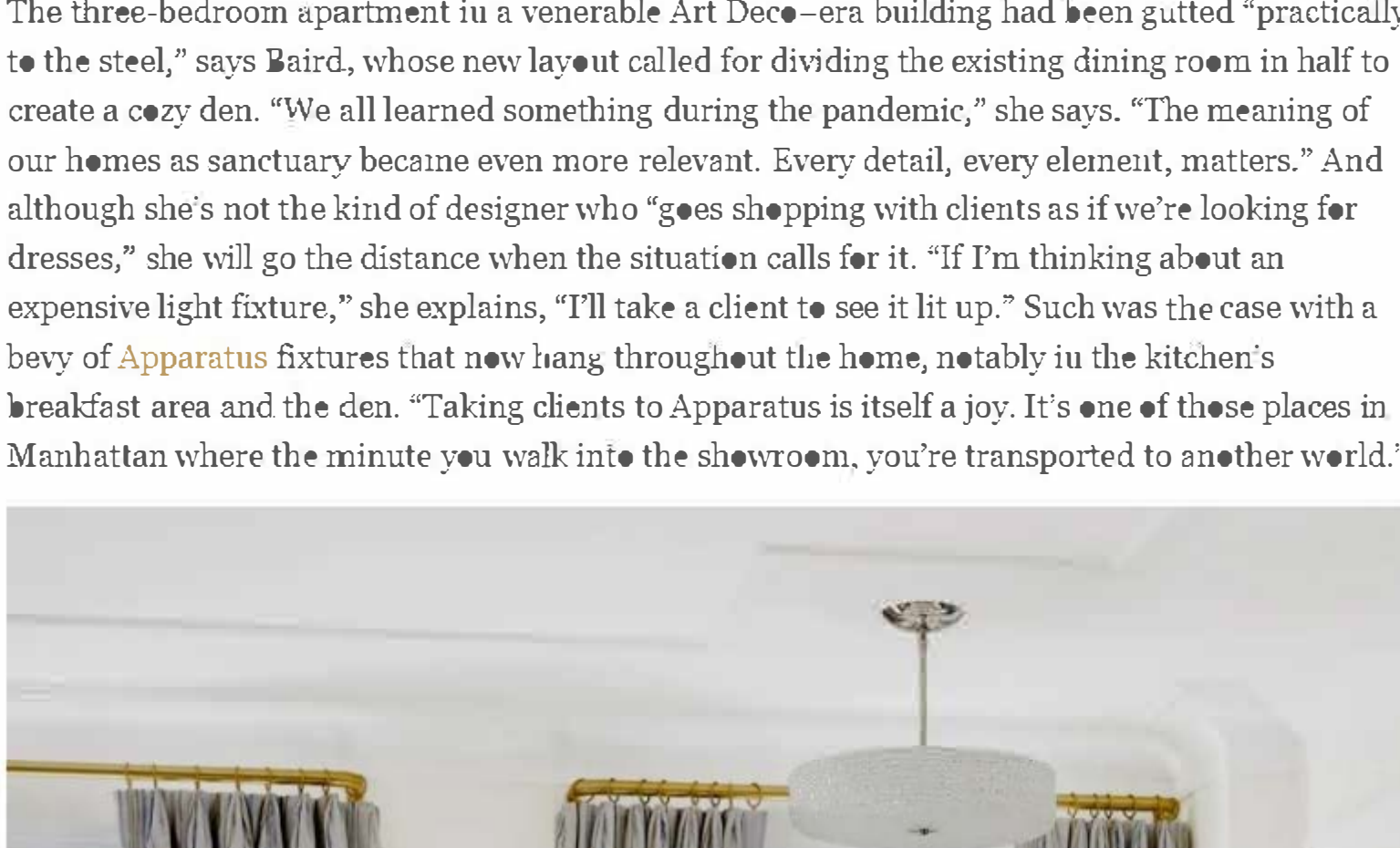
Katz recalls with a laugh, “Penny FaceTimed with us to show us the table, as well as a pair of shagreen side tables for our bedroom. During the entire process, we were impressed by her amazing ability to understand a problem and then solve it, while considering what connects to a client’s personal aesthetic and sense of home. I had an idea for a home that felt ‘modern Parisian,’ but I didn’t exactly know what that meant until Penny showed us.”



Photography by Trevor Tondro

Furnishings in the living room include a pair of armchairs by Promemoria and a curved sofa by Bespoke by Luigi Gentile. The Chan cocktail table is by Philip and Kelvin LaVerne.

The three-bedroom apartment in a venerable Art Deco-era building had been gutted “practically to the steel,” says Baird, whose new layout called for dividing the existing dining room in half to create a cozy den. “We all learned something during the pandemic,” she says. “The meaning of our homes as sanctuary became even more relevant. Every detail, every element, matters.” And although she’s not the kind of designer who “goes shopping with clients as if we’re looking for dresses,” she will go the distance when the situation calls for it. “If I’m thinking about an expensive light fixture,” she explains, “I’ll take a call to see it lit up.” Such was the case with a bevy of Apparatus fixtures that now hang throughout the home, notably in the kitchen’s breakfast area and the den. “Taking clients to Apparatus is itself a joy. It’s one of those places in Manhattan where the minute you walk into the showroom, you’re transported to another world.”



An onyx and bronze table and wool-upholstered chairs from Promemoria occupy a corner of the living room. Photography by Trevor Tondro

Baird divided up the living room, which overlooks Central Park, into a variety of seating areas and introduced novel forms, particularly a curved sofa, a shape some might think counterintuitive to maximizing space. “A rounded sofa doesn’t require as much wall space and was key for the way this room is configured,” she says. The decorator even dedicated a corner next to a resplendent French window, a shimmering table, which doubles as a home-office workspace for Katz, who is active in arts administration.



The wood veneer wall covering in the den is from Maya Romanoff. Photography by Trevor Tondro

Adding even more French-inflected flair, Baird designed a two-toned neoclassical-style marble floor in the foyer and employed reclaimed French oak boards, set in a chevron pattern, for flooring in most of the rooms. “Every apartment in Paris seems to have chevron floors,” she comments, “so it’s close to my heart. And it allows you to use shorter boards cut from longer planks.” The meticulous character and grade notes that Baird has lent the apartment have won over her smitten client, who says she loves it “so much that I like to joke that this is where I plan to die—and that certainly will give me even more time to savor every moment living here!”

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