

TRADITIONAL HOME.

A traditional living room interior. In the foreground, a dark wood chair with a decorative backrest is partially visible on the left. A white sofa with a textured throw blanket is in the middle ground. A glass coffee table holds a white ceramic bowl filled with red apples. Behind the coffee table, a white vase holds a bouquet of light pink flowers. The background features a window with sheer curtains, letting in natural light. The overall aesthetic is classic and elegant.

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**NEW LUXURY TRIMS, FURNITURE MASTERPIECES
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MIX MASTER

DESIGNER
ERIC COHLER
STIRRED NEW LIFE
INTO HIS OLD
NEW YORK
MAISONETTE BY
PLAYING OFF
CONTRASTS.

BY ELVIN McDONALD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
JEFF McNAMARA

The living room suggests at times both black and white and rich in color and contrast: a Regency sofa and an old English side table, a contemporary painting by Larry Claffie, and a Baroque table circa 1760. Opposite Eric Cohlér is front of the Regency-inspired slipsew.





Left: A 19th-century Georgian sofa upholstered in mattress ticking and a circa-1940 Giacometti table cozy up to the Georgian fireplace. The painting above the mantel is by Raeburn, a 19th-century Scottish painter; Larry Charles did the contemporary canvas on the wall to the left. Right: A collection of pre-Columbian pieces stands in front of a drawing by Jean Cocteau. Above: Cohler designed the dining table with sawhorse bases, crafted by a cabinetmaker.

FUSION IS NOT A MYSTERY TO INTERIOR DESIGNER ERIC COHLER; IT IS SIMPLY WHAT HE DOES

EVERY DAY, SUPERBLY. THIS GIFT FOR THE merging of diverse elements into a unified whole, demonstrated in his own New York City maisonette, earns a Design Award from us. "It was originally a doctor's office," Cohler says, "and hadn't been touched since the 1940s." The 1,400 square feet on two floors were divided into a series of cubicles and rooms for examinations and X-rays. "To make it livable," Cohler explains, "I had to erase the past and focus on how best to make it into a living space for myself. Since it had not been an apartment, there was no looking back even though I am, at heart, a preservationist."

Cohler is quick to acknowledge the role his parents played in helping him express his own style. "They were married in 1956 and lived in the city. I can't say I love everything they chose as furnishings, but the furniture and art from them that is in my apartment today show that by consistently choosing pieces they loved, they also had a certain talent for picking contemporary pieces that had the potential for becoming classics."

The primary difference between a maisonette and a regular apartment is that a maisonette has a private entrance on the ground floor. Cohler's entrance opens to a foyer and stairs leading up to the new living rooms. "The handrail is architectural bronze, which is less expensive than brass," Cohler says. "For the balusters, I had a welder join together stock elements of iron to suggest a Regency stair rail." The interesting look of the wall leading up from the lower level was created by a craftsman who plastered the surface, then, while it was still wet, embedded strings in it to create a large block pattern. When the plaster was almost dry, he removed the string. The wall, which looks as though it's made of blocks of real stone, is painted a limestone color and is now hung with pictures.

The largest space in the apartment, the living room has two sets of windows at one end,



Subtle cross-hatching of the study walls with red and black paint before glazing plays up the black-and-white photographs. The sofa is upholstered in glen plaid suiting fabric, which also lines the toile de Jouy curtains.



Below: A round window found in a junk shop brings light into the study from the entry hall. Cohler designed the ottoman. His longtime interest in black-and-white photography is represented here by prints in silver frames, the latter also serving to enhance the otherwise soft natural lighting.

with three bookcases built around them. The bookcase cabinetry also creates a recessed area for the drapery rods. A round travertine table divides the two seating areas. "I like mixing traditional and contemporary," Cohler says, "also old and new, expensive and inexpensive." Instead of the expected old quilt as an accessory for a comfortable chair, he opts for the unexpected, a brand-new mover's blanket that is neatly folded over the back. Traditional, meet Industrial Chic.

As to color, he admits to trying the "monochromatic thing of beiges and browns, but it didn't work for me personally. Monochromatic rooms tend to become stilted and self-conscious, whereas color resonates a timeless quality. I've learned I need to live with color."

Fabrics from New York's fabled wholesale garment district are one of Cohler's favorite touches. Two matching 19th-century Georgian sofas in the living room are upholstered in bold black-and-white striped mattress ticking. A couch in the study is done in glen plaid suiting, which also lines the black-and-white toile de Jouy curtains in that room. "You can buy bolts of high-quality wool suiting and cotton shirt-making fabrics for remarkably low prices," he says. "They're great for pillows, curtains, and upholstery. There's also an incredible



