



B.A. Torrey called his swanky room, "The Afterparty." Above the sofa is a photograph by Ellen von Unwerth.
Emily Andrews for The New York Times

By Penelope Green

April 30, 2018

It's spring! (Sort of.) A more reliable sign than the balky weather is the [Kips Bay Decorator Show House](#), opening Tuesday in an Upper East Side brownstone. Now in its 46th year, the show house is always a spectacle, a three-dimensional tour into the lives of the 1 percent. (The townhouse is for sale for \$51 million.) This year, 22 designers are spread out over seven levels and about 15,000 square feet.



Juan Montoya was reaching for lunar imagery in this graphic living room. Emily Andrews for The New York Times

One of the more ravishing spaces is in the basement, where Juan Montoya built an entire living room — from the paneling to the ceiling — from scratch. The designer said he was inspired by “cosmic forces.” In his living room, one floor up, David Netto recalled the Manhattan of his youth. Now 48, Mr. Netto was a teenager during the heyday of Kips Bay, when Mario Buatta, the so-called Prince of Chintz, and Mark Hampton, the scholarly traditionalist, squared off like gladiators in show house after show house, alongside Albert Hadley or Joe D’Urso or John Saladino, designers whose flourishes were more modern. Manhattan in those days was a tale of two cities, both of which were radical in their own fashion.

“There was the downtown, music-driven club world,” Mr. Netto said, “and the uptown, neo-Gilded Age, neo-Rothschild fantasy” that was erupting along Park Avenue, where Mr. Buatta and Mr. Hampton were creating blood red habitats with acres of damask and armies of old masters for their robber baron clients. Park Avenue wives would shop at Kips Bay, swooping in to buy entire rooms — from pelmet to pilaster — and you might find yourself, as Mr. Netto once did, meeting exiles from earlier eras, like Slim Keith, one of Truman Capote’s swans. “Lady Keith, Mario called her,” Mr. Netto said, meaning Mr. Buatta.

Mr. Netto’s father owned Cowtan & Tout, the fabric house, and Kips Bay was family business. “It cemented my taste,” said Mr. Netto, whose very modern living room comes with some pointed ’80s references, like tobacco-colored lacquer walls.



A kaleidoscope of postmodern pattern by Sasha Bikoff is an homage to Memphis design.
Emily Andrews for The New York Times

What Else Will I See?

In the stairwell, Sasha Bikoff presents a tutorial in Memphis design. On the roof, Charles Pavarini’s post-consumer-plastic fake turf chairs are, quite literally, lawn furniture, and very comfy. In a tiny black-and-bronze bathroom by Scott Sanders, there’s a pair of Goya engravings, a Harry Benson photograph of the Beatles and handmade wallpaper that looks like Moroccan leather. There are red stenciled borders in Katie Ridder’s blush-colored guest bedroom and a lovely wallpaper in the front hall, by Michael Herold, inspired by Poussin landscapes.



Alexa Hampton was thinking about campaign tents, Greek temples and other neo-classical totems. "Clearly, I have seen 'Gladiator' one too many times," she said. *Emily Andrews for The New York Times*

Alexa Hampton made an enticing tented room with touches of rose and an abundance of neo-classical references. (Like Mr. Netto, Ms. Hampton grew up in Kips Bay show houses, and she remembers when her father, Mark Hampton, took her second grade class to see one of his rooms at Kips Bay. "He had done a magnificent black-brown room and I was very proud of him," she said. "I strutted like a peacock in my class for weeks afterwards.")



Mr. Torrey wrapped the walls in gold foil cork to evoke a late disco-era lounge. *Emily Andrews for The New York Times*

"The Afterparty" is what B.A. Torrey called his swanky midnight blue lounge. It connects to a wraparound bar, where you'll find a piece by Kehinde Wiley, President Barack Obama's portraitist.



Warrior women and hand-painted faux bois walls in a living room by Bunny Williams and Elizabeth Swartz.
Emily Andrews for The New York Times

A pair of fearsome warrior princesses in a paneled living room by Bunny Williams and Elizabeth Swartz feels culturally appropriate.



A well-layered sitting room by Philip Mitchell. Emily Andrews for The New York Times

There are 26 pillows in 26 different fabrics and 36 pieces of art in this sitting room by Philip Mitchell. That's Lee Radziwill over the sofa, in an early '60s photograph by Mark Shaw called "Blue Cape in a Brocade Room."



Detail from a retro bedroom by Mark D. Sikes. Emily Andrews for The New York Times

Mark D. Sikes outfitted his bedroom with retro accessories.



Jamie Drake and Caleb Anderson were just two of the many designers at Kips Bay who were thinking about cocktails and added a bar (at left) to their sitting room. Emily Andrews for The New York Times

There are lots and lots of bars, including one by Jamie Drake and Caleb Anderson that recalls the glittering corners of Studio 54, and another by Wesley Moon with a feathered mirror made by Bill Cunningham, the fashion and society photographer and a New York City institution.



A summer house bedroom's sitting area by Alessandra Branca, with a Tina Barney photograph of a Rhode Island beach.

Emily Andrews for The New York Times

A country house bedroom by Alessandra Branca comes with a photograph of a Rhode Island beach by Tina Barney, the Nan Goldin of the Ocean State.

Why Does all This Matter?

Today, when hedge fund managers and start up bros — the robber barons of this millennium — shop mostly at Art Basel and Restoration Hardware, it is startling to contemplate the theatrics of Kips Bay. To be sure, rooms decked out in hand-painted wallpaper that sells for thousands of dollars a yard are the stuff of fantasy, yet the admission price to such fantasies pays for educational and developmental programming for 10,000 children, the mission of the Kips Bay Boys & Girls Club for over a century. It's why the designers break their backs building sets for free on a punishing schedule, cajoling and pleading with artists, dealers and craftspeople to do the same. In return, you get to see a swell looking space.



David Netto conjured the red rooms of '80s-era Manhattan — the heyday of the Kips Bay showhouse — with tobacco-colored lacquer on the walls of this living room. *Emily Andrews for The New York Times*

What Happens to all That Stuff?

The owner of the house keeps most of the fittings — some wallcoverings and the bathrooms — and a trophy kitchen. (This year's is by Clive Christian. It comes with two Baccarat crystal chandeliers, and the backs of the cabinets are lined with turquoise leather.)

How Do I Get There?

The Kips Bay Decorator Show house is open Tuesday through May 31 at 110 East 76th Street, between Park and Lexington avenues. Tickets, \$40; information, kipsbaydecoratorshowhouse.org.

Penelope Green is a reporter for Styles. She has been a reporter for the Home section, editor of Styles of The Times — an early iteration of Styles — and a story editor at the Times magazine. [@greenpnyt](https://www.instagram.com/greenpnyt) [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/greenpnyt)



Design

The Secret in a Brooklyn Apartment Redo? Plywood
March 6



New on the Block: The Little Black House
March 7



Every Plant Has a Story. You Just Need to Dig.
March 4



Trending

The Questions Mueller Wants to Ask Trump About Obstruction, and What They Mean
