



Andrew Bolton and Thom Browne (holding Hector, a wirehaired dachshund) on the steps of their Manhattan town house.

MAGAZINE

Step Inside Thom Browne and Andrew Bolton's Storied House on Manhattan's East Side

The fashion designer and curator's Sutton Place home was originally built for Anne Vanderbilt

By Mitchell Owens

Photography by William Abranowicz

Styled by Howard Christian

November 1, 2022

What do Elsie de Wolfe, Renzo Mongiardino, Harrison Cultra, Georgina Fairholme, and David Kleinberg have in common? Yes, all are boldface interior decorators of uncommon importance and signal influence, but more importantly, they all lavished their expertise on the selfsame house. That would be the redbrick beauty on Manhattan's far East Side that architect Mott Schmidt created in the early 1920s for Anne Vanderbilt, she being a moneyed widow who was giving up her late husband's fabulously pinnacled Fifth Avenue castle for something a bit less egotistical and a lot more elegant.



In the sitting room, a pair of Jacques Quinet [cocktail tables](#) stand on a vintage Swedish flat-weave rug from [Doris Leslie Blau](#). Circa 1939 [Märta Blomstedt](#) armchairs clad in sheepskin.

"The proportions are so magical—that's what seduced us," says Andrew Bolton, Wendy Yu curator in charge of the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (and, with Anna Wintour, one of the forces behind the annual Met Gala). He and his partner, Thom Browne, the fashion star who was recently named the next chairman of the CFDA and who made headlines in 2018 when the Ermenegildo Zegna Group acquired 85 percent of his namesake brand in a deal that valued the company at \$500 million, encountered the illustrious residence while house hunting a couple of years ago. Though they initially had Greenwich Village in their real estate sights, they kept being drawn back to Sutton Place.



AD100
BEST OF THE BEST
GET 1 YEAR OF AD FOR \$49.99 \$19.99
Receive an AD tote, 2023 Calendar, plus 4 free gifts!
SECURE YOUR ISSUE

"It's one of the most special neighborhoods in the city," Bolton continues, and, arguably, the house that he and Browne now own is its most alluring. The 70-foot-wide façade may seem well-mannered and spatially economical—the house is just one room deep—but the architecture has a distinctive spirit that Browne describes as "a dominant persona, and we were perfectly happy submitting to that and doing what the house wanted."



A pair of 18th-century English painted settees and a Diego Giacometti table stand in front of the drawing room fireplace. Rose Uniacke sofa; walnut live-edge cocktail table by George Nakashima. Art: © John Kirby, courtesy of Flowers Gallery

Coincidentally, the building's Anglo-American politesse makes an appropriate background for the figural art to which the couple gravitates, though the collection has more breadth than that of a classical Georgian domain. There are no ancestral portraits or views of Venice to be seen. Instead, an Anh Duong self-portrait with a teddy bear is displayed in the mirrored dressing room, a Miaz Brothers blurred painting is mounted above the dining room's George III sideboard, and works by Duncan Grant, Roger Hilton, Norman Rockwell, William Merritt Chase, and others discreetly embellish seemingly every space, including a heart-stopping Crucifixion from the workshop of 16th-century Dutch artist Jan van Scorel.



An ensemble of Georgian-era furniture—a leather-topped octagonal table, cane-backed chairs, and gilt-framed mirrors—stands on the second-floor stair landing.

"Thom's a good Catholic boy," Kleinberg observes of his longtime friend, who always said that one day, the three amigos would do a house together. Surprisingly, none of the couple's art came under discussion until after the furniture, carpets, and mirrors had been installed. "When I asked what Andrew and Thom owned, the most fascinating pictures began to come out of boxes—I was floored," says Kleinberg, recounting how he, Browne, and Bolton eventually walked around, cradling pieces in their arms, and discussing where each would look best. "It's a very old-fashioned way of doing things," the designer adds. "The art wasn't bought for the house."





In the dining room, [regency klismos](#) chairs encircle a circa 1800 dining table. 19th-century sofa in a scalamandré damask. [Jansen](#) sconces flank a Georges Rouault painting and a 17th-century crucifix. Georges Rouault © 2022 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Decoratively speaking, Bolton and Browne were taken with the house's origins, back when Anne Vanderbilt lived in beautiful but relatively restrained decors, so archival imagery was gathered and studied. Not to replicate anything, mind you, merely to take the measure of what had come before. Luckily, the house's new owners' tastes meshed with those of the long-ago society doyenne. Says Browne, "Andrew's are a little more decorative than mine but in the best, most refined way," while Bolton calls his partner's eye "more eclectic than people think it is. Whether it's early 19th century or midcentury modern, he's all about precision and proportion." Which explains why the rooms that Kleinberg and his clients assembled together may range widely across the centuries and schools of aesthetic thought, but they don't confuse the eye or puzzle the mind. There is a sense of harmony that outfitting a space, say the dining room, with whiplashing gold René Drouet chairs from the 1940s, an English Regency sofa upholstered in emerald-green damask, a 17th-century crucifix, and a gutsy George Nakashima table does not necessarily suggest. Indeed, when Kleinberg asked photographer William Abranowicz to show him the digital images in black and white, just for fun, during the photo shoot, he was pleasantly surprised to see that the rooms had an unexpected timelessness. "Unless you knew what you were looking at, you wouldn't know what year the house was decorated, though that wasn't the goal," the designer says.



The kitchen includes Ann-Morris pendants, Bauhaus ceiling lights from [Urban Archaeology](#), and sconces by [The Urban Electric Co.](#)

Shared with Hector, a dashing little [dachshund](#), Bolton and Browne's rooms are all about mental processing rather than visual pizzazz. Serenity and contemplation aside, the building turned out to require a near-gut renovation, due to its dated infrastructure: new baths, new kitchen, new floors, replacement windows, the removal of a terrace conservatory, and the complete reconfiguring of the top floor's former servants' area to accommodate a primary bedroom and bath, a kitchenette, and a dressing room. "We were hoping for wonderful discoveries during the renovation," the history-minded Bolton says, adding that not a fragment of Mrs. Vanderbilt's glorious Asian staircase murals, executed by Allyn Cox, remained. "Even the original chimneypieces were gone, as was the black-and-white marble floor in the foyer."



1 / 24



The redbrick neo-Georgian façade of the circa 1920 mansion.

Those losses were, in some ways, Kleinberg's gain. Much of the original architecture remains, but the plain ceilings were reconsidered by Craig Doyle, a principal at Kleinberg's firm, who dressed them up with decorative features so soigné that surely Schmidt would have approved. Ditto some molding embellishments. "Andrew and Thom are not purists, but they do appreciate design and craft," Kleinberg says. "That's really important to them." So was Bolton's sole request: a Chinese Export-style wallpaper—somewhere, anywhere—that not only addressed his fanciful side but would serve as a footnote to one of Elsie de Wolfe's legendary leitmotifs. Instead of placing the paper in a prominent place, though, Kleinberg wrapped it around the primary bedroom, turning it into a virtual garden that nobody but the owners will likely see. "Andrew and Thom are two very public figures," Kleinberg allows of his friends, "but they are also two very private people. That's why this house feels so right. The door opens, and I know precisely who lives there. That's when decoration is successful."

This story appears in AD's December 2022 issue. To see Thom Browne and Andrew Bolton's home in print, [subscribe to AD](#).

More Great Stories From AD

- [11 Stunning Homes Built Into Nature](#)
- [Inside Travis Barker's Surprisingly Tranquil Calabasas Abode](#)
- [Tour the Ultimate Coastal Grandma Retreat in Maine](#)
- [50 Best Online Furniture Stores to Bookmark Now](#)
- [Inside Brad Pitt's Design-Forward Real Estate Portfolio](#)
- [10 Gardening Mistakes to Avoid at All Costs](#)
- [The Indoor Plant Trends That Are Ruling 2022 So Far](#)
- [The 23 Most Beautifully Designed Modern Coffee Shops](#)
- Not a subscriber? [Join AD](#) for print and digital access now.