



**FACING PAGE:** Designer Todd Alexander Romano, at his apartment on Manhattan's Upper East Side. **THIS PAGE:** The living room's vintage Jansen bergères are upholstered in a Claremont stripe, an Italian rococo stool is covered in a Clarence House velvet, and the Mongolian lamb's wool rug is vintage; both the painting by C. H. Schulz and the mirror by Zajac and Callahan are circa 1970. See Resources.

# DRESSED to the NINES

*For decorator Todd Alexander Romano, more is always more. And there's no better proof of the success of that formula than his own richly layered jewel-box apartment*

TEXT BY KATHLEEN HACKETT  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILLIAM ABRANOWICZ  
PRODUCED BY ANITA SARSDI

As a grade-schooler in the early 1970s, Todd Alexander Romano loved to turn the playhouse in the backyard of his family's San Antonio home into a pop-up shop. "I filled it with books, blow-up pillows, and posters," recalls the dapper Manhattan-based interior designer. One hardcover he did not put up for sale was his mother's copy of *Billy Baldwin Decorates*. "I got my hands on it, and she never got it back," he says.

From as far back as he can remember, Romano has loved beautiful things: Pop and Op Art, Staffordshire pottery, Japanese porcelains, French chairs—his early collecting habits were all over the map. His father, one of a long line of Italian engineers and builders, was a frustrated architect who passed on his passion to his son. "I studied architecture in school, until I realized I couldn't have cared less how a house was supposed to stand up," Romano says. What truly interested him was a home's history and how people lived in it. "I'm obsessed with how people entertain, read, watch TV."

Not one to settle for second best, Romano set his sights on a job with decorating legend Mario Buatta. "I called him at least 25 times, until he finally agreed to interview me," Romano says. "He loved to tell me that my father was paying him off to keep me working."

His apprenticeship with the droll Prince of Chintz might explain the oil painting of a hunting dog in Romano's living room, but curiously, there's not an inch of glazed floral fabric anywhere. "Oh, I use chintz in my work, absolutely," Romano insists, "but in different ways."

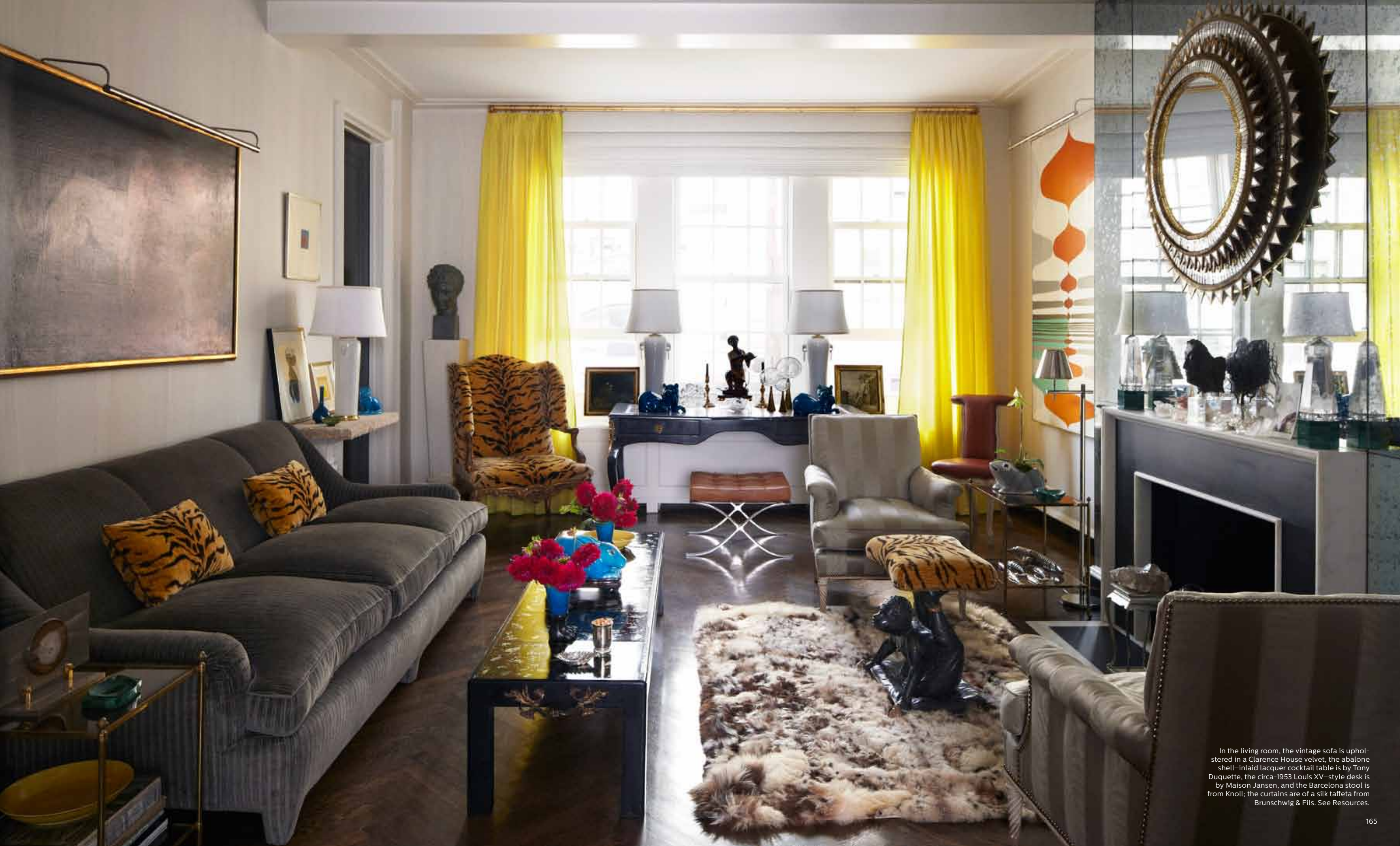


Indeed, he is that rare decorator whose work defies tidy definition, and nowhere is his innate talent for mashing up different periods and styles better executed than in his own Manhattan apartment. "My taste is highly schizophrenic," he explains. That seems an understatement—in a good way—given the more than 15 pieces of furniture in his 350-square-foot living room, few of which hail from the same period. Add in the Op Art lining the walls, and the sculptures and objets arrayed on every surface, and the total number of items hovers around 70. "What's so interesting is that no single piece in the room jumps out at you," Romano says, as if he's surprised even himself.

Before he bought the apartment two years ago—a one-bedroom in a gracious prewar building on the Upper East Side—Romano was living in a lacquered navy-blue studio apartment in a black-glass tower with views of the Chrysler building and the George Washington Bridge. As glamorous as the place was, he found he wasn't suited to living with people "stacked on top of each other," as he describes it. His heart was set on the estate-condition (read: total gut) apartment, despite its open floor plan and narrow galley kitchen. His Texas roots aside, so much wide-open space left the designer cold, but the beautiful herringbone floors, and the fact that he could walk to his eponymous shop, won him over. "I've got a bit of that peddler-decorator in me," he says with a laugh.

Working with the architects Richard Bories and James Shearron, Romano kept the parquet, ripped out the rest, and set to work creating





In the living room, the vintage sofa is upholstered in a Clarence House velvet, the abalone shell-inlaid lacquer cocktail table is by Tony Duquette, the circa-1953 Louis XV-style desk is by Maison Jansen, and the Barcelona stool is from Knoll; the curtains are of a silk taffeta from Brunswick & Fils. See Resources.



Louis XV chairs covered in a Clarence House velvet are paired with prints by Robert Goodnough, left, and Andy Warhol, and the circa-1970 Lucite sculpture is by Vasa Mihich; doors in a glossy black by Fine Paints of Europe lead to the entrance hall, which features a Regency mahogany hall chair and walls glazed in a custom green lacquer. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP:** A circa-1970 console by Willy Rizzo, a late-19th-century European chandelier, and a pair of Josef Albers prints in the entrance hall. Regency chairs with silk cushions surround a Saarinen table in the kitchen; the walls are lined with vintage silk paper, the artworks are by, from left, Rachel Lee Hovnanian, James Nares, Steven Klein (top), and Mark Shaw, and the television is by Samsung. See Resources.







distinct, classically proportioned rooms. “Putting back the walls actually makes the place seem much bigger than it is,” he says of the apartment’s 1,000 square feet. Strong vertical lines and extra-tall doors, inspired by those in Sir John Soane’s Museum in London, draw the eyes up, creating the illusion that the ceilings are higher than nine feet. The kitchen is now roomy enough to eat in, although the designer admits to being a terrible cook. “I needed a place to work in, so I decorated it as if it were as important as the living room. Because it is!” he exclaims. “I spend a lot of time sitting at that table,” he says of the Saarinen classic that he has surrounded with Regency chairs.

Romano’s flair for playing with provenance and his fearless use of color is obvious throughout the apartment, but he points to a more subtle quality as the real reason the rooms work. Among the greatest lessons Mario Buatta taught him was to pay obsessive attention to the tiniest details. When Romano points out the grosgrain ribbon set into the seams of the sofa cushions, he lights up. “It’s the ribbon trim beneath upholstery nails, and the scant quarter-inch of grosgrain peeking out from the rim of a lampshade, that make all the difference,” he insists. “You could say that I am fanatically thoughtful when it comes to these things.”

It’s not a whole lot different than when he put his possessions up for sale as a kid. “I’m doing the same thing I was doing when I was eight, only it’s a lot more sophisticated,” he says. ■



In the master bedroom, the custom-made headboard is upholstered in a Kvadrat felt, and the linens are by D. Porthault; the commode is in the style of Louis XVI, the chair is Louis XV, and the mirror is 19th century. **FACING PAGE:** The sink in the master bath is by Waterworks, and the gouache is by Jean Cocteau. See Resources.