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## The 2004 Palladio Awards

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# 2004 PALLADIO AWARDS

Residential Architecture: Restoration & Renovation

Winner: G.P. Schafer Architect

## Renovating a Townhouse Apartment

**PROJECT:** TOWNHOUSE APARTMENT,  
GREENWICH VILLAGE, NEW YORK, NY

**ARCHITECT:** G.P. SCHAFFER ARCHITECT,  
PLLC, NEW YORK, NY; GILBERT P.  
SCHAFFER III, AIA, PROJECT ARCHITECT

**GENERAL CONTRACTOR:** PETER COSOLA,  
LONG ISLAND CITY, NY

When Gil Schafer, AIA, bought his parlor-floor townhouse apartment in the historic Greenwich Village section of New York City in the fall of 2000, he acquired a small, but potentially elegant home. The 900-sq.-ft. apartment had 13-ft. ceilings, 12-ft. windows and a few original Italianate/Victorian elements remaining from its original form: three adjacent parlors in an 1850-60s townhouse. The previous owner had renovated and overlaid Modernist elements on the historic interior.

This was all to change as Schafer "sought to restore period detail to a much-altered fabric while exploring several architectural themes." After 18 months of design and construction, completed in May 2002, the apartment now resembles a "Minard Lefever interior of the 1830s with the glamour and mischief of a David Adler/Frances Elkins interior of the late 1920s and 30s." Where plain, pallid walls had existed previously, a rich terra-cotta finish now furnishes a backdrop for Ionic columns, custom moldings, a scagliola mantel and other details.

"One of the challenges was the high ceilings," says Schafer. "There is actually more square footage on the walls than on the floor, and this enormous height was a daunting problem. It was a challenge just trying to proportion things to the scale of the space. The doors are taller, for example, and I had some new furniture built to accommodate the ceiling height. The volume of the space makes lighting a challenge, too." Schafer's solution was to use numerous lamps throughout the apartment, combined with strategic uplighting, following the examples of David Hicks, a decorator he admires.



The living room in the 900-sq.-ft. apartment renovated by New York City-based G.P. Schafer Architect in New York City's Greenwich Village features 12-ft. French windows that overlook the street. The windows were rebuilt and the integral jamb-panel folding shutters were re-created to match the ones that would have been there originally. The dining table doubles as a desk. Unless otherwise noted, all photos © Paul Costello

Schafer originally planned to keep the triple-parlor floor plan, using the front room as the living room and the center room for dining, with the two separated by a new screen of columns. He found, however, that this didn't really suit a contemporary lifestyle, so he changed the floor plan to incorporate a large living/dining room (14x22 ft.) in the front with a small wainscoted gallery in the center of the apartment. The column screen of custom plaster Ionic columns was pushed back to separate the main living room from this gallery, which opens into the kitchen and leads to the bedroom in the back of the apartment.

When the two parlors were opened into one larger room, the mantel in the former front parlor (facing the double entry doors) became off center. To balance it, Schafer designed a new large mahogany bookcase that he added to the same wall to form a focal point for the main seating area.

The new custom-made scagliola chimneypiece, meanwhile, was modeled after one in an Asher Benjamin pattern book for the period. Fabricated by Ahmad Suleiman of Doylestown, PA, it resembles black marble with white veining.

To reinforce the look of the 1830s, the architectural elements were custom designed for the apartment, including the cornice, base and



The large living room is separated from the wainscoted gallery with a screen of Ionic columns. Inspired by Minard Lefever townhouse interiors of the 1830s, the columns echo the scale of the French windows on the opposite wall. The columns also define the gallery, which provides access to the kitchen and to the rear of the apartment. The main seating area is grouped around a new mahogany bookcase built to balance the fireplace on the same wall.



architrave moldings, plaster ceiling roses, doors and replacement French windows with integral folding jamb shutters. All were inspired by Minard Lefever patterns. The plaster architectural ornament (cornice, moldings & ceiling roses) was the work of Fred Martin of New York City. Peter Colosa of Long Island City was responsible for the construction in the apartment and for all of the millwork and cabinetry, including the doors, paneling, kitchen cabinets and running trim.

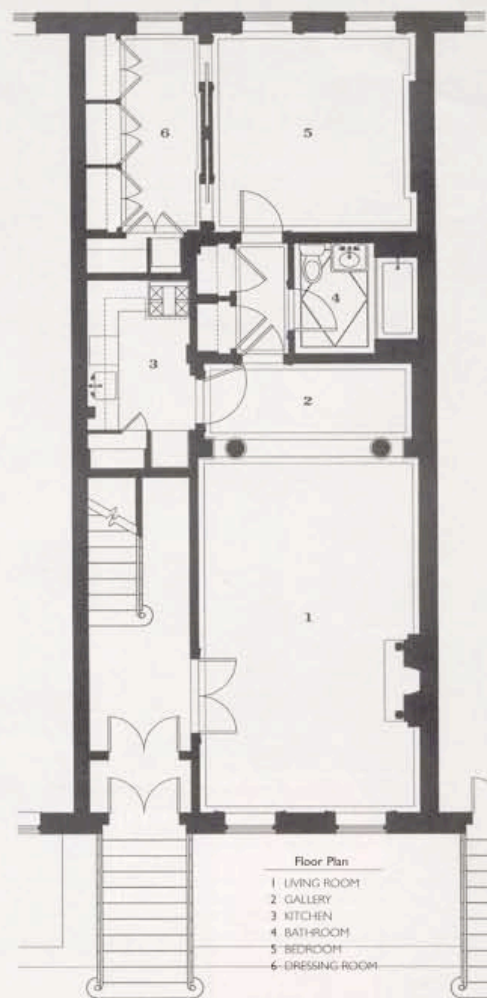


This view of the living room shows the appearance of the apartment before G. P. Schafer Architect gutted and renovated it. Everything was painted white and the living area included two parlors. Photo: G.P. Schafer Architects, PLLC

Schafer turned to Rhett Butler of New York City-based E.R. Butler Co. to create historical hardware for the interior, including hinges, doorknobs, cabinet hardware, custom concealed door pivot hinges and cabinet hinges for concealed panel doors. Cobalt crystal knobs from one of E.R. Butler's 19th-century reproduction lines were used for the doors, combined with custom brass hardware. These are paired with custom key tassels created from an abandoned 19th-century pattern. E.R. Butler fitted the entry doors with double brass rim-locks and a large nickel silver key thumb turn. "I share Rhett Butler's obsession with hardware," says Schafer. "He made the cobalt crystal knobs for this apartment, as well as custom escutcheons that are copies from a 19th-century model." The finish on the hardware is not the usual light satin antiqued finish, but is instead a custom finish designed to make the hardware look like it had aged with time. "It turned out that this was an incredibly difficult patinating process," says Schafer, "because it doesn't have the typical etched quality of a satin finish."

The 8-ft. doors throughout the apartment were painted to resemble mahogany rails and stiles surrounding inset panels of crotch mahogany with ebonized panel molds. This faux wood graining was the work of decorative painter Jean Carrau of New York City.

Accessed through the galley at the rear of the living room, the kitchen has simple painted rail and stile cabinetry with glass upper cabinets with ribbed glass and portero marble countertops. Satin nickel hardware with a pewter wash was used to give the cabinetry a time-worn quality and to distinguish it from the more formal brass hardware in the main rooms. The kitchen also features the dark-stained quartersawn oak flooring used throughout the apartment.



Floor Plan  
1. LIVING ROOM  
2. GALLERY  
3. KITCHEN  
4. BATHROOM  
5. BEDROOM  
6. DRESSING ROOM

Schafer took the former triple-parlor layout of the apartment and changed it to feature a large living room (1) in the front, a central gallery (2), small galley kitchen (3), bathroom (4), bedroom (5) and dressing room (6).



This custom-made scagliola chimneypiece was made to resemble black marble with white veining to contrast against the terra-cotta glazing on the walls, a color scheme drawn from ancient Greek vases. The black marble theme is carried throughout the apartment with black marble in the kitchen and bathroom.



An additional frieze above the cornice over the entry doors complements the typical architrave molding with croisettes used throughout the apartment. The faux-wood-grained doors are painted to resemble mahogany rails and stiles surrounding inset panels of crotch mahogany with ebonized panel molds.





Above: Eight-ft. faux-painted doors and moldings appear throughout the apartment. This one leads into the kitchen where painted rail and stile cabinetry and glass upper cabinets contrast with the formal appearance of the main rooms.



Right: A tall bed inspired by a French steel "campaign" bed from the 19th-century was used in the cube-shaped bedroom, which, like the other rooms, has 13-ft. ceilings. The walls in the rear of the apartment were upholstered to create a quieter environment.

The approximately 12x12-ft. bedroom is almost a perfect cube, Schafer notes. He felt that the high ceiling called for a tall bed to anchor it. The solution was a steel bed frame, inspired by French steel "campaign" beds from the 19th century, crafted by metal artisans Les Metalliers Champenois of Paterson, NJ. Because the townhouse is in a wood building where sound transmission is a factor, "I upholstered a lot of the walls to help make the apartment quiet," says Schafer. "It has a very tailored, flat look so that it doesn't look like typical wall upholstery. The back room features silk and others are felt or brown velvet."

Schafer carried the black marble with white veining theme from the mantel into the bathroom, using negro marquina marble. The slab marble floor is inlaid with 1-in. strips of polished nickel created by E. R. Butler, recalling the interiors of David Adler. Paneling in this room provides a contrast to the marble and allowed Schafer to integrate grilles for exhaust fans and stereo speakers. It also provided a way of hiding cabinets.

Nine hundred square feet may not be much space, but this apartment provided a number of challenges. Schafer's careful use of detail and space planning has turned this once-plain apartment into a showpiece. "This was an opportunity to have control over every facet of the project, from the architecture to designing the furnishings and decoration," says Schafer, "and to have a complete tabula rasa. We designed every inch of the apartment. It was also an opportunity to work with all of the



E. R. Butler created custom hardware for the residence, including these cobalt blue crystal doorknobs that were used throughout the apartment. They are from one of Butler's 19th-century reproduction lines. The entry doors were fitted with double brass rim-locks and a large nickel silver key thumb turn.

different craftspeople, from those who did the faux graining, scagliola and plaster columns and capitals to people who made the French campaign bed, to make it all come together." — Martha McDonald

*G.P. Schafer Architect, PLLC, is a small, full-service architectural firm specializing in traditional residential architecture. Based in New York City, it is directed by Gil Schafer III, who won a Palladio Award for a Greek Revival home in upstate New York in 2002. (Period Homes, Summer 2002, p. 12) A graduate of the Yale School of Architecture with a masters degree in 1988, Schafer has been involved in residential projects in locations around the country and has been published in a number of magazines, such as Architecture, Japan Architect, Country Life, Departures and House & Garden. He also serves as chairman of The Institute of Classical Architecture & Classical America.*



The proportions and detailing of the columns, anta pilasters and entablature of the Ionic column screen were derived from Minard LeFevre pattern books from the 1830s as well as from other period archaeological survey drawings from the Greek temple at Illisus. Three different craftspeople were involved in these columns: Visions in Plaster in New York City produced the drawn plaster moldings, Ahmad Suleiman made the anta and column capitals and Toronto, Ontario-based Balmer Architectural Mouldings custom made the turned plaster column shafts and bases.