

William Haines
designs

CLEAR VIEW

DESIGNER TURNED DECORATIVE-ARTS ADVISER MICHAEL FORMICA LIVES WITH WHAT HE RECOMMENDS—CHOICE PIECES THRILLINGLY COMBINED

Text by David Colman · Photography by Bob Hiemstra · Styled by Lili Abir Regen

IT IS TEMPTING to draw a line between the gracious apartment houses of yore and the charismatic glass monoliths of today. Yet there are a handful of buildings that represent a magnificent hybrid of the two—most notably Manhattan's U.N. Plaza, the pair of streamlined, bronze-tinted towers that has overlooked the United Nations since 1966.

"I've always loved this place," says Michael Formica, a New York City designer who moved into one of the buildings two years ago with his partner, photographer Bob Hiemstra. Formica still vividly recalls his first encounter with U.N. Plaza, back in the early 1970s. He was a student at the Rhode Island School of Design and came to New York to visit a friend whose parents lived there in a duplex decorated by Jansen. "I didn't know what Jansen was," Formica says of the celebrated Paris firm that refurbished the White House for the Kennedys. "All I saw was this black marble floor and a tented dining room with the walls upholstered in Indian paisley—all over-the-top gorgeous."

Today the apartment complex is just as Formica remembers it. "It's like a swanky Lincoln Continental," he says. And though potent nostalgia for the glamour that defined U.N. Plaza when Robert F. Kennedy, Truman Capote, and Johnny Carson were among its residents led Formica back, the designer did not set out to make his new home a blast from the past.

Rather than the wall-to-wall carpet, flocked wallpaper, and triple window treatments of blinds, sheers, and drapes that have been used to counteract the buildings' period modernity over the years, Formica and Hiemstra went for something different: a clean, well-lit space. Formica is using their two-bedroom place as a



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A Georgian sofa by George Smith, a woven-back chair by Samuel Marx, and an upholstered William Haines armchair in the living area; vintage aluminum tortoise lamps by Arthur Court sit on carved-wood plinths by John Dickinson, and the pillows are made of vintage Kuba cloth. See Resources.