


Town & Country  
"Our Design Showcase: Penthouse Serenade"  
*by*  
Sarah Medford





Is this... a hotel? The Lowell's newly renovated penthouse breaks the mold with hand-painted silk wallpaper from de Gournay, Nancy Koltes linens and a custom canopy bed. Opposite: A breakfast tray greets guests in the entry hall, which is painted Allium Green and Wash Basin White from Ralph Lauren Paint. The curtain fabric is Masquerade from Cowtan & Tout. For shopping information on furnishings and fashion, see page 240.



Our Design Showhouse

# PENTHOUSE SERENADE

At Manhattan's chic Lowell hotel, *Town & Country* and designer Michael S. Smith hit a high note as they give the top-floor suite a glamorous update.

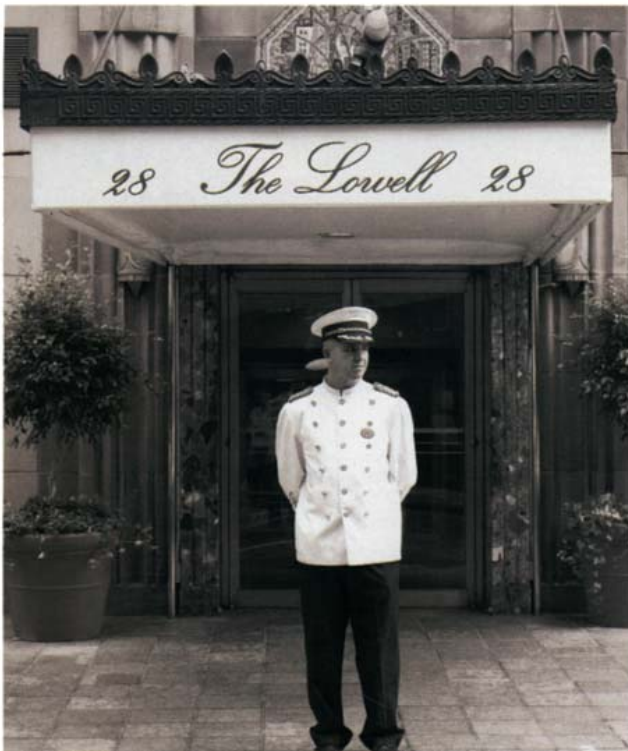
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WHO WANTS the robe from a fancy hotel room anymore? We'd all much rather have the eight-nozzle steam shower, the olive-wood shutters, the amber room fragrance or the duvet cover handsewn with Tahitian mother-of-pearl buttons. Hospitality design has evolved to the point where the world's great hotel rooms are what our own homes aspire to be: paragons of beauty, comfort, functionalism and order. (Once they figure out how to bottle unconditional love and stock it in a minibar—don't bother with the home cooking—hotels may finally become the center of the universe.)

At about this time last year, *Town & Country* was given the opportunity to investigate the hotel-home parallel when the Lowell, New York's most discreet five-star hotel, approached us about advising on the remake of its three-bedroom penthouse suite. The hotel's owners, real-estate developers and brothers Fouad and Nabil Chartouni and Fouad's wife, Dina, planned to renovate down to the studs of the seventeenth-floor aerie, which overlooks the sidewalks and town houses of Manhattan's East 63rd Street. In the suite's reincarnation, the Chartounis hoped to marry hotel service of the highest order, their specialty, with residential design at its most refined, *T&C's* area of expertise; if we helped them synthesize the two, these professionally hospitable people might give us insight into how they've created a place that has seduced guests like Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson, Michael and Susan Dell, Jo Malone, and the Missoni family into becoming lifelong regulars.

The Chartounis, who have owned the Lowell since 1982, were



In the living room, Smith makes clever use of new furniture to achieve an aged look. The sofa, alabaster lamp and pair of Venetian-style fauteuils are from his own Jasper collection, while the parchment coffee table is from J.F. Chen and the carpet from Mansour. Ralph Lauren Home provided the curtain rods and finials here and throughout the suite; all fabrics are from Larsen and Cowtan & Tout. Ferguson & Shamamian Architects, consultants on the project, suggested adding columns to demarcate the living room and the dining room beyond. Below left: The Lowell's public face.





Smith added limestone floors from Ann Sacks and a built-in cabinet to the suite's glass-walled dining area, evoking the atmosphere of a French conservatory. The mirrored glass table, from Jean de Merry, in Los Angeles, holds Christofle silver, William Yeoward glassware, Tiffany china and E. Braun linen napkins. The chairs are from Sentimento. Opposite, from top: A James Nares painting, courtesy of the Paul Kasmin Gallery, over a desk from Gerald Bland Antiques; Lowell co-owner Dina Chartouni and Michael S. Smith.



mindful of maintaining its European élan as well as its private character (for more on the hotel, see page 204). That said, Fouad and Dina Chartouni had lived in the penthouse for seven years while redoing a town house, so they knew exactly what it lacked. The couple saw renovation as an enormous opportunity.

"In the past ten years, there have been so many changes in technology that have affected hotel design," says Dina Chartouni. "With flat-screen TVs, for example, we don't need those bulky armoires in every room anymore. We're using more indirect light from the ceiling and wall-mounted fixtures. And anybody who's interested in music has an iPod, so they want a dock, rather than a stereo, and they want it right by the bed." Other changes the couple hoped to make were more stylistic, loosening up the toast-rack-and-tea-sandwiches look of the space.

With T&C's blessing, the Chartounis hired Michael S. Smith, a designer who "gives classicism a modern edge," as Dina puts it, for clients including Steven Spielberg and Kate Capshaw, Evelyn and Lynn de Rothschild and Rupert and Wendi Murdoch. They'd known Smith for almost a decade and admired the work he'd done in the guest rooms at Shutters, the Santa Monica, California, beach hotel. Though based in L.A., the designer is taking on more projects in New York these days, including sizable jobs for clients old and new; he is a regular guest at the Lowell.

"Staying at the Lowell is like staying in a town house,"

### Michael S. Smith's Rules of Renovation

1. If you can, live in the space first. People tend to overrenovate when they don't.
2. Find a contractor you genuinely like. Renovation is a hard process, in some ways like a marriage. Start out with a partner you respect.
3. You get what you pay for. Never go with the cheapest contractor or make your builder choose the cheapest subcontractor. That creates a very weak pyramid, with your contractor on top, precariously holding your job in his hands.
4. Spend ample time on the plans before demolition. Let all the voices be heard—architect, designer, contractor, landscape designer. Your project will be much stronger for it and run more smoothly.
5. When you start your renovation, make sure to finish it. If you don't get to something when the walls are open and the dust is flying, you never will.



Breakfast wouldn't be the only meal you'd want to take in bed in this room, whose starting point—and masterstroke—is wallpaper by de Gournay, painted in the style of a Japanese screen. In the far corner is an armchair from Nancy Corzine; a Sony flat-screen TV is just out of sight on the right. The curtains are of Kansu silk by Larsen. Opposite: Tranquil moment, tranquil room.







Smith says. "There are fireplaces in almost every room, and the service is impeccable." The idea of another New York job also had its appeal. "I love working in the city, though it's much harder than working in L.A.," he admits. "When you're installing a room here, for example, you can't just step back out of a window and stack your boxes on the lawn—everyone is sort of on top of each other in a hallway. It's very difficult logistically. But I do like it. The resources are always great; the craftspeople are always amazing." Not to mention that one of Smith's favorite collaborators—Oscar Shamamian of Ferguson & Shamamian Architects, LLP, one of the country's top interpreters of classical building styles—is based in downtown Manhattan. Although Shamamian's involvement at the Lowell was advisory, and the final work reflects the hands-on participation of the

scratches and marking, which you do by putting furniture in front of them. Bedroom closets need to be big enough to hold safes. Bedside tables should absolutely not have little drawers in them—people just leave things there and forget about them when they check out."

Given the tight time frame of about five months for design and renovation (the latter took ten weeks), Smith and the *T&C* team had to work sequentially, first plotting out the kitchen and baths, areas with the longest lead times. Bathrooms are a personal favorite of Smith's, so much so that he has already designed collections of tile for Ann Sacks and fixtures, hardware and lighting for Kallista. Hotel bathrooms, with their generous size and whiz-bang features, have contributed to the recent revolution in home ablution; Smith enjoyed the irony of improving the Lowell's

owners, the conceptual input of his team, which included Brian Covington, Michael Simeone, Andrea Trietsch and Matthew Winter, was invaluable.

A renovation ten years ago had given the 2,200-square-foot penthouse and its three small terraces a pleasing layout. The entertaining areas—kitchen, dining room and living room—are accessible from the front hall, while the master bedroom, its dressing room and its bath are tucked into the suite's southwest corner, with two additional bedrooms and baths nearby. These come in handy when guests are traveling with children—or when they want a private gym or a piano moved in or have some extra clothes on rolling racks.

Smith understood the shortcomings of the penthouse and could forecast its potential charm. Inspired by the hotel's Manhattan personality—more Nora Charles than Nora Ephron—he started building a story for the suite the way he would have for any client, keeping in mind that the results would have to play well in front of a large audience, provide the succor essential in a grand hotel space and stand up to hard use.

"Hotel rooms need to be more flexible and durable than residential rooms," says the designer. "You have to think about providing more storage. You have to think about protecting the walls from



Smith used his own For Town line of bath fixtures, designed for Kallista a few years ago, to set the glamorous tone he wanted in the master bath. Ann Sacks's Selene honed marble appears on the vanity top, walls and floors; the alabaster Bowl light is from Vaughan; and the Berling sconces here and in the dressing room (opposite) are from Ralph Lauren Home. Also in the dressing room: Nancy Corzine's Versailles mirrored glass desk; a Muse telephone table from Profiles; a Serge wall mirror from Dessin Fournir; and a vanity mirror and painted chair from John Rosselli & Associates.



baths with his own residential fixtures, from the deep soaking tub to the vanities on slim fluted-nickel legs. Ann Sacks provided milky-white marble with blue-green veins for these spaces, in addition to limestone for the entry, kitchen and dining room.

Kitchens at the Lowell get a surprising amount of use, since guests often bring in caterers for parties, or cook themselves during longer stays. Smith wanted to make the existing kitchen more functional and worked with Poggenpohl to get the most out of the compact space. The company didn't quite resort to every trick in its book—the seventy-square-foot kitchen doesn't have

baseboard storage, for instance, or Poggenpohl's beautifully engineered tambour-front storage unit—but it did wedge in a wall-mounted espresso system from Miele and other luxuries, including a twenty-seven-inch Sub-Zero refrigerator.

Choosing the color palette for the suite was easy, since the de-

#### Showhouse Sponsors

- Ann Sacks: 800-278-TILE
- Cowtan & Tout: 212-647-6900
- Kallista: 888-4-KALLISTA
- Nancy Corzine: 212-223-8340
- Poggenpohl: 800-987-0553
- Profiles/New York Design Center: 212-689-6903
- Ralph Lauren Home: 888-475-7674
- Ralph Lauren Paint: 800-379-POLO
- Sub-Zero: 800-222-7820

### Checking In at the Lowell

As one after another of the Upper East Side's fabled hotels (the Plaza, the Mayfair, the Stanhope) converts to condominiums, the Lowell quietly opens its reservation book on another year, happy to be of service to the clients who have made it a second home—as well as to new guests who like their surroundings intimate and their luxury straight up. The boutique hotel has been in business on East 63rd Street since 1927. From its Empire-style lobby to guest rooms outfitted with Continental antiques, Chinese porcelains and wood-burning fireplaces, the Lowell cultivates a European look. Service is discreet and exceptional, and no one is kept waiting for anything, except maybe a taxi now and then. There are forty-seven suites and twenty-three deluxe rooms on seventeen floors, most with full kitchens and some with landscaped terraces. The Pembroke Room, on the second floor, is popular for breakfast and tea, and the Post House restaurant, off the lobby, serves admirable steaks and seafood.

With its private setting and its residential feel, the Lowell appeals to world travelers in the entertainment business, from conductor Daniel Barenboim to Amy Pascal of Sony Pictures. The high-profile guests include equal numbers of Americans and Europeans, all of whom appreciate its proximity to Madison Avenue and the museums of the Upper East Side. The six weeks leading up to Christmas are the hotel's busiest, but even August has its sold-out days—everyone loves New York right now, and everyone who can afford it loves the Lowell.

*Rooms from \$545, depending on the season. Suites from \$935. Penthouse suite from \$7,500. 28 East 63rd Street; 800-221-4444; lowellhotel.com.*

signer knew it would need to have broad appeal. Smith used hues from Ralph Lauren Paint that referenced the Lowell's neighborhood vistas: the limestone of surrounding buildings, soft tree greens, sky blues and grays. He sought out the same colors in the wide range of fabrics he chose, again turning to a company with which he's designed a collection, Cowtan & Tout. Committed to luxurious results, he went with the cotton damasks, textured linens and silk velvets that he employs for his residential clients.

Despite the short notice, Smith's usual family of suppliers came through for him, including Jamb, with a George I-style mantel; de Gournay, with hand-painted wallpaper; J.F. Chen, with antiques and accessories; Stark, with stripey carpeting designed by Jack Lenor Larsen; and Peter Elezaj, with decorative painting and wallpapering. When it came to furniture, the designer looked to well-known vendors like Nancy Corzine and Profiles, in the New York Design Center, for pieces that seemed authentically old as well as new in some way, such as Corzine's mirrored desk, with its vast surface area, and the diminutive telephone tables from Profiles, which are some of the most useful items you can add to a modern living room. The overall effect is polished and full of personality, resulting in a place that Nick as well as Nora Charles would jump to check into. The *Town & Country* Penthouse is a treat right down to the living-room pillows made from vintage Japanese textiles, the chocolate-brown Peruvian throws on the guest beds, the swirly Venetian-

One of the suite's three bedrooms includes a pocket terrace, visible here in the round wall mirror, which is from Profiles, in the New York Design Center. Also in the room: a Vence ceramic lamp from Vaughan and a Dessin Fournir bed. Opposite: In a space only slightly bigger than a bread box, Poggenpohl managed to design a full-service kitchen with its AL series aluminum-clad cabinetry. On the left is a Sub-Zero refrigerator; on the right are a Miele Incognito dishwasher and electric cooktop. The faucet is from Michael S. Smith Loft for Kallista, and the deep stainless-steel sink is by Franke.

style glassware from Anthropologie in the kitchen cabinets (among Smith's many punchy, less expensive finds) and the diverse and highly readable assortment of books on the shelves.

"Hotels should have the distinctiveness of a private house," Smith insists. "That's what smart people who travel want now." As one of those people, and a Lowell convert, the designer has created a suite he would call his own in a minute. He'll have some heavy competition from fellow out-of-towners, of course, not to mention all those New Yorkers looking for a home away from home when their own apartment renovations lag behind schedule. All that's left for the Lowell, it seems, is to get on with that bottling of unconditional love. ✕

