



ALL THE

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Designer
Markham
Roberts
turns a
modern city
apartment
into a cozy
family lair



Right: Electra Toub in her entry hall with daughter Allegra and son Christopher. The sconces are from John Rosselli; the antique Asian storage cabinet is from Mrs. MacDougall at Hinson. Facing page: The faux-tortoise mirror is by decorator Markham Roberts.

TRIMMINGS

High style and holidays don't necessarily go together. Decorators and architects have learned to cope with everything from huge flat-screen TVs to high-tech climate controls, but how many can incorporate Santa Claus and mistletoe, strings of lights and gingerbread houses? Who can picture baby-angel candles in a Corbusier house? John Pawson and fruit-studded Renaissance swags?

The holidays, though, remain as primal and potent as ever, and in these uncertain times a bit of seasonal magic can't hurt, no matter what the surroundings. Fortunately, a new generation of decorators is merging the refined, clean lines of modernism with the comfort and warmth of tradition, creating the kind of rooms that can put on the season's raiment with ease. The Manhattan apartment that Markham Roberts has decorated for Christopher and Electra Toub and their two children is an example. As sleek as the apartment is for 11 months of the year, during the holidays it achieves an aura of enchantment.

Perhaps the Christmas decorations fit in so well because the apartment already sounds a few discreet theatrical notes. The living room's simple upholstered furniture and neutral colors are offset by touches of chinoiserie, from the oxblood-red entry's fanciful pagoda lantern and sconces to the vaguely Asian sideboard that the decorator designed for the dining room. Roberts worked with Mark Hampton for almost six years before going out on his own, so he understands the power of allusion and the strength that a touch of whimsy can bring to a room.



“Markham has a no-fuss, no-muss style of decoration”



Above: The decorator gave the paneled walls of the library seven coats of charcoal paint. **Left:** The large living room is divided into two seating areas by a pair of faux-horn étagères designed by Roberts. The floor covering is a sisal from Misha Carpet. The wooden armchair is an Anglo-Indian piece.

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A seascape photograph by Karen Butler sheds its serenity on the black-and-neutral living room. The bench of bamboo, chrome, and ebony is from Ralph Lauren. The coffee table, a Roberts design, has a faux-horn finish.





“The plan is wonderful, and Markham made it flow so beautifully”

After years working in the merchandising department at Ralph Lauren stores, Electra Toub knew what kind of decorating help she wanted. But personality counted, too: “After I had my second child, I needed a decorator I could talk to at 6:15 A.M. and have the conference wrapped up by 6:30,” she says. “Markham has a no-fuss, no-muss style of decoration. I knew he would not lead me down 300 different paths.”

It helped that Roberts already had a connection to the apartment. Friends of his had seen the space, and he had tried to convince them to buy it. “It was dowdy and dirty,” he says. “Everything that could have been done to disguise its niceness had been, and my friends couldn’t see its quality.” But when brokers showed it to Electra Toub, she certainly could. “I love that there is both a children’s side and a grown-up side,” she says of the two private areas that are separated by the living room. One contains bedrooms and a playroom for Allegra and Christopher; the other is a master suite with a separate dressing room. “The plan is wonderful, and Markham made it flow so beautifully. He helped me to push my limits, made me take risks I might not have otherwise. He kept us from looking old.”

“They were game,” Roberts says of the Toubes, “so it was fun.” Among the flights of fancy: upholstering the walls of the dining room; hanging the family’s most valuable painting, a Raoul Dufy, in the playroom; and creating a color-matched faux Rothko for the living room, at least until a real one comes along. “Markham’s the most amazing furniture designer,” adds Electra, citing the upholstery he designed, a pair of faux-horn étagères that divide the living room, and the stepped bedside tables in the master bedroom.

The Toubes’ kitchen is that Manhattan rarity, a room for cooking that is not only big enough to eat in, but virtually to live in. “It’s our tradition to build gingerbread houses with the kids for Christmas,” says Electra, “and the kitchen is ideal for that. I love the thought of a small-town holiday, and we can almost pull that off here in the city. The apartment feels modern, but it’s still cozy.” ●

Facing page: A floral striped fabric covers the dining room walls and a related pattern is on chairs from British Khaki; both fabrics are by Brunswick & Fils. Holiday greenery is threaded through a wire chandelier from John Rosselli. **Below:** In the master bedroom, a custom copy of Syrie Maugham’s signature sleigh bed is covered in a Ralph Lauren ticking. The wall fabric is a Cowtan & Tout linen. Roberts designed the bedside tables. For more details, see Resources.

