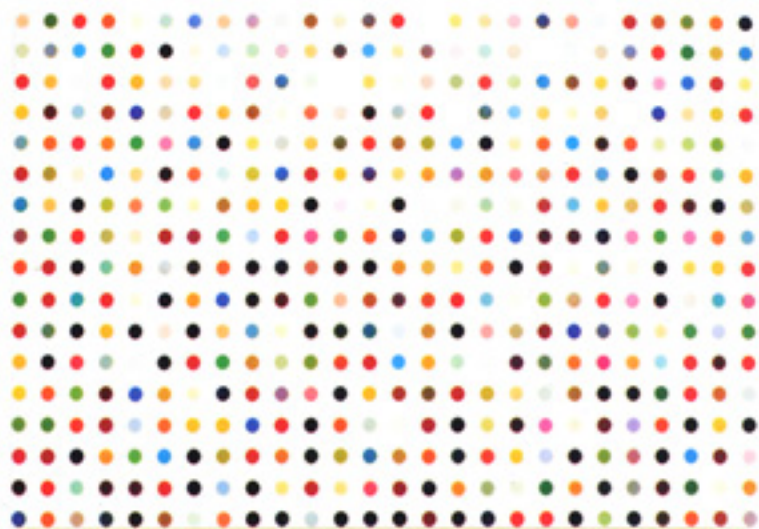


# INTERIOR DESIGN®

SEPTEMBER  
2006



New York  
Flying High





upstairs,



downstairs

"MY MOM WAS A LITTLE CREEPED OUT," Harry Allen admits, standing in the buzzing East Village headquarters of **Harry Allen & Associates**—an 1840's town house that was once a funeral home. "I told her, 'All this needs is a coat of paint.'" And thus began one of those real-estate fairy tales so quintessentially New York.

Back in 1998, when Allen took possession, the place was decrepit. Furthermore, he says, he started without any idea of "just how bad the neighborhood was." His timing was spot-on, though. Property values were about to reawaken from a drug-induced coma. Today, Allen figures he "could probably only buy a one-bedroom apartment" with what he paid for the entire four-story building.

Ultimately, the place got a lot more than that "coat of paint." Behind the redbrick and painted cement facade, Allen has built an empire, with his showroom, office, and studio on the ground level. Upstairs is the 1,000-square-foot apartment he shares with his partner, gardener John Holm.

Everything and nothing in Allen's past prepared him for this magnum opus. Despite an early →

*From left: In the East Village building where Harry Allen lives, works, and sells his designs, the studio features a tin ceiling and a Living Systems table topped in walnut veneer and aluminum. The window advertises his Reality accessories, including a cast-resin Banana bowl.*



*Clockwise from top left: In the showroom, Dowel and Box lamps accompany a custom bed. The front doors retain their funeral-home handles. Custom desks in the office are topped in plastic laminate. Allen's rubber lamps are stacked in the showroom. Production pieces sold in the 700-square-foot space also include designs in handblown glass. A worktable in the studio has a base made of file cabinets and a top of laminated fiberboard. In the showroom, Allen's Square chair sits beneath a photo of his piggy bank.*

interest in ceramics, he switched to political science in college. A couple of years later, he began studying graphics at the Parsons School of Design. When a charitable professor advised the young designer that he just wasn't any good, he switched again, to industrial design at Pratt Institute. His thesis project, a system of modular case goods, appeared at the International Contemporary Furniture Fair in 1993. "At that point," he says, "I thought I was going to be a little furniture company."

As it turned out, he went on to design cosmetics packaging for Estée Lauder, M.A.C., and Origins as well as numerous residential and commercial interiors. He's best known for collaborating on SoHo's Moss gallery and its ambitious duplex expansion.

Confronted with 150-plus years of accretions to his own building, Allen says, his first instinct was "to erase history" in favor of a Moss-like minimalism. Recently, though, he's become less fussy about making everything uniformly new. Witness the original oak-

strip flooring left intact in his showroom, where he sells his own furniture and accessories, both custom and production pieces. [Candles, pillows, and hand towels are in the works.]

The showroom's track lighting, however, is a recent addition. Anticipating wiggles down the center of the ceiling, which is still un-

even, he took a page out of the Moss playbook and hung 80 feet of track from an expensive system of rigid channels.

He's come to terms with the imperfectly installed track lighting in the long public space that dominates the newly reconfigured one-bedroom apartment on the second floor. In the half of the →





*Clockwise from top left: For his apartment's dining area, Allen designed a table made of parallel-strand processed wood and combined five off-the-shelf ash cabinets to build a wall-mounted credenza. Sitting on it are his Ceramic Foam lamps, part of the Museum of Modern Art's collection; the digital print of a moth is by Joseph Scheer. The bedroom's large oil on canvas is by Emilio Sanchez. Allen designed the living area's customized Ferguson sectional and built the pine table, which displays a mahogany chair by Donald Judd. In the bedroom, fiber-optic strands dangle from Allen's ceiling fixture.*

public space that serves as a living area, a sectional sofa forms a U surrounding a square pine cocktail table. On top of it, he arranged a boxy acrylic vase, three colorful cast-ceramic cabbages by an old friend, and a small but bona fide Donald Judd mahogany chair—perched there, Allen explains, to discourage anyone from “sitting and scratching it with their Levi’s buttons.” At the opposite end of the space, a nearly 15-foot-long dining table of parallel-strand processed wood is surrounded by 14 Eamesian shell chairs on Eiffel Tower bases.

Meals are prepared in the adjacent alcove kitchen, its restaurant-grade stainless-steel cabinetry sourced without knobs. Bending down, Allen demonstrates how he opens a lower drawer to gain a grip on those above—as his own client, he’s more than willing to compromise function for purity of form. “People ask me about ergonomics,” he continues. “I think that if you bang your foot one time, you’ll never do it again.”

In pursuit of a duplex twice as large as his current space, Allen has set his sights on repossessing the third floor’s rental apartment. Given what he’s accomplished so far, you have to believe him when he concludes, “I really can’t afford myself.” —Craig Kellogg

SIDE CHAIRS (STUDIO) HERMAN MILLER, CUSTOM TABLE (STUDIO), LAMPS, SCONCES, VASES, CUSTOM BED, CUSTOM LIGHT BOX, CUSTOM SHELVING, CUSTOM RED CHAIR (SHOWROOM),

CUSTOM TASK CHAIRS (STUDIO) HARRY ALLEN & ASSOCIATES, SHELVING (STUDIO, OFFICE) AMSCOR, TRACK LIGHTING (SHOWROOM, STUDIO, APARTMENT) LIGHTOLIER, CHAIRS (OFFICE) KEILHAUER, DESK SURFACING, FORMICA CORPORATION, CLOCK, BENZA, FILE CABINETS (STUDIO) HARTER, TASK CHAIR FABRIC, CARNEGIE, CHAIRS (DINING AREA) MODERNICA, CREDENZA UNITS, IKEA, TABLE MATERIAL, WEYERHAEUSER, VASE, ORREFORPS, STOOL, THROUGH SMITH & WATSON, CUSTOM SOFA (LIVING AREA) DUNE, PILLOWS, JOHN ROBISHAW TEXTILES, BOWLS, CANDLESTICKS, PIGGY BANKS, HOOKS, AREAWARE, GENERAL CONTRACTOR: BRIGHT CONTRACTING ENTERPRISES.

