

SMALLVILLE

Compared to his last place, Harry Bader's 350 square feet are palatial. Carole Nicksin peeks in.



in their decorating history. Bader, the executive director of global merchandising for Estée Lauder, has kept every piece he's ever bought ("It won grand prize at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1900," he says, pointing to a black lacquer chair by Gustav Siegel. "Why would I ever get rid of it?"). With each apartment, Bader adds a piece or two and continues to refine the presentation.

The same tempered, systematic approach even carries over to the color of his walls. Bader deliberated long and hard before choosing a soft gray tone of paint (Benjamin Moore No. 1542, formerly called Dove Gray) for his first apartment. True to form, he has stuck with the same shade ever since.

"From a very young age, I developed a feeling of wanting things I could keep forever," says Bader, who bought a set of Louis Vuitton luggage at age 17 with the

Harry Bader, left, in the living room of his jewel-box East Village apartment, below. The interior contrasts sharply with the building's funky exterior, far left.

first semi-sizeable chunk of money he got his hands on. "I always thought about things in that way. Why waste your money? There's so many things that cost money, you want to travel, you want to experience things. You need to stretch every dollar."

Bader was first seduced by the austere elegance of the Secession movement back in the mid-80's, when he was doing windows and display for department stores.

"I had just seen this show at the Modern called 'Vienna 1900,' and I really liked the whole look," he says. "I started to read more about it, and I found it fascinating. It was the beginning of what we think of as modern."

His first purchase was a black lacquer table and chairs designed by Josef Hoffmann for the Cabaret Fledermaus.

"There was a store called Galerie Metropole on Madison Avenue that specialized in that period," Bader says. "I had just gotten a check from a freelance job, so I did it. I spent \$2,300 on the table and chairs, and that was 20 years ago."

The move to Riverside Drive occasioned the acquisition of a few new pieces. Bader beefed up his collection with the aforementioned chair by Gustav Siegel and a small sofa covered in black velvet. Made to the specifications of a Hoffmann design, it's still the only reproduction in the place.

With 150 square feet of additional floor space to play with, Bader allowed himself to expand beyond the realm of turn-of-the-century Vienna, moving forward in time with a *trompe l'oeil* Fornasetti screen from the 1950's and backward with a Biedermeier cabinet. "I'm not really a purist," he says. "There are a few different periods and styles in here, but they all have classic lines."

When Bader signed the lease on his current apartment three years ago, he knew it was time to make a long-overdue trip. A pilgrimage to Vienna yielded a Hoffmann wall mirror and coat rack, two pieces that seem to complete the collection.

The gray walls, black lacquer furniture and rich wood grain of the Biedermeier armoire create an atmosphere as formal and gentlemanly as Bader himself. Just as a well-tailored suit can improve

To envision the series of apartments that Harry Bader has inhabited since moving to New York more than 20 years ago, it's helpful to think of nesting boxes. The first one, a long and narrow 100-square-foot hallwaylike affair on West 14th Street, would fit comfortably within the second, a 250-square-foot studio on Riverside Drive. Bader's current abode, a 350-square-foot one-bedroom in an East Village tenement building, is diminutive by almost any standard, but spacious enough to hold the Riverside studio with room to spare.

This migration from infinitesimal to tiny could be interpreted as a parable of Manhattan real estate, but it is just as much a reflection of Bader's methodical nature. Not only has the size of his apartments been a slow and steady progression; the same could also be said of his furnishings, a small but growing collection of Secession-era furniture by Josef Hoffmann and other Viennese designers from the beginning of the 20th century. While most people junk everything and start all over again at least once

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the wearer's posture, the apartment elevates guests to its level, imbuing them with an elegance rare in the 21st-century world.

"With all the gray and black, some people think it's depressing, but I think it's soothing and calm," Bader says. "There's something light about it to me, like a floating feeling. The walls and the furnishings recede, and only the people exist. I've tried adding touches of color, but it doesn't work. People add the color in the room."

Twelve-foot-high ceilings add an extra boost of grandeur to the place, but also give it a topsy-turvy scale, since most rooms are taller than they are wide. Bader further accentuated the odd proportions by outlining the apartment with eight-inch-wide crown molding.

Far more disorienting than the apartment's proportions is its location. This sliver of Vienna is at odds with its East Village environs, just as the very proper Bader is at

odds with his very alternative neighbors. And although the apartment shines like a gem, the building it's housed in is no jewel box. The decrepitude only emphasizes the apartment as a sanctuary of refinement.

"At least it's clean," is the best Bader can say about his building.

"But there's no reason why we should have to put up with bare fluorescent bulbs in the hall. I mean, that's what you put up with in New York, but I don't know why you should."

Next, Bader hopes to find an apartment in a building that is more in keeping with his aesthetic. Aside from that, he's happy making small improvements on the status quo. He'll continue to hone the same decorating aesthetic he's been working on since the 80's. Although most New Yorkers lust for space, Bader is definitive about only wanting the next size up.

"I like small rooms," he says. "I can't imagine living in one of those vast houses people live in today. There's no intimacy. This is tiny, and I wish it were bigger, but that will be the next version." ■

A Fornasetti screen hides the kitchen, right. Viennese Secessionist furniture, like the Josef Hoffmann mirror in the bedroom, below, predominates. A closet, bottom right, conceals the shower.

