In the living room of Steven Gambrel and Chris Cooper's Manhattan home, the Sèvres chairs and hallowed sofa were designed by Gambrel and upholstered in Pierre Frey and Richard & Stilman fabrics, respectively. The paintings are by Willem Held, the rug is by Gambrel design, and the custom-troweled wall color is from Paitone Paints by Fire. Facing page: Gambrel's Proenca side chairs are upholstered in a chenille from Carlucci, and the contrasting walls on the curtains are inspired by a naval uniform. See Resources.

restorative power
STEVEN GAMBREL'S NEW MANHATTAN DIGS
LOOK OLD-FASHIONED FROM THE OUTSIDE, BUT INDOORS IT'S ALL ABOUT THE HERE AND NOW
TEXT BY ANDREW FERREN PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILLIAM WALDRON PRODUCED BY ANITA SARSID}
After more than a decade spent creating sleek, urban spaces for his city clients, interior designer Steven Gambrel has finally found a Manhattan dream house he and his partner, Chris Connor, can call their own. To almost everyone else, however, the property — a four-story townhouse in the West Village that was built in 1857 — initially had nightmares written all over it. Fortunately, the couple has renovated several run-down buildings in the past few years, including their Long Island home, and they love a challenge. Their new house provided many.

For starters, Gambrel and Connor were faced with removing nearly two centuries’ worth of dilapidated, makeshift additions that gave the rear façade a hodgepodge appearance. Inside, the situation was even more daunting. The handsome Federal interior was divided into nine grim single-room-occupancy apartments, one of which had been lived in by the bank robber portrayed by Al Pacino in the movie Dog Day Afternoon. “The house dates to the era when...
Gambrel designed the sofa and the dining table, which has an oak base by Dunbar. The vintage chairs are from Axel Vervoordt. Facing page, clockwise from top: in the library, Gambrel's Turkish sofa is upholstered in P Kaufmann fabric, and the vintage folding table is by Dunbar. A Jensen desk in the same room. The bar area's gold leaf wall covering is by Gracie, and the shelves hold Dutch and Japanese ceramics. See Resources.
"I'M ALWAYS A LITTLE LET DOWN BY HOMES THAT IMMEDIATELY BETRAY AN OWNER'S PASSION FOR FRENCH DECO OR WHATEVER. A BIT OF SUSPENSE IS GOOD," GAMBREL SAYS

Greenwich Village was first booming," says Gambrel, a fervent admirer and student of 18th- and 19th-century architecture, "so we wanted to restore the charm and clever utility that merchants' homes of that period were known for.

Graceful reminders of the past abound, such as the original cooking fireplace in the basement, now the focal point of the new kitchen. With its pale stone floor and uneven masonry walls, the room has an historic air, and its earthy elegance and broad stone-top table have made it a favorite dinner-party venue. Another relic is the horse walk, an alley running through the building and leading back to a carriage house. Though the path eats into valuable square footage, Gambrel was inspired by the small spaces it created above and below it. Underneath the walk he installed a handy wine cellar off the kitchen, and overhead is a minuscule bedroom accessed through a hidden door off the staircase. The designer further tweaked the bedroom's diminutive proportions by covering the walls with bold Batik from Uzbekistan. "I think that making the most of such challenges is what gives a home personality," he says.

Even for a man known for his confident mixing of styles and daring sense of scale, Gambrel's deft layering of objects acquired from antiques dealers and flea markets across Europe and the States is surprising. In this library, a vintage leather-top desk made by the legendary French decorating firm Jansen is paired with a 1960s Danish chair wearing its original blue horsehair. Paintings by French and American artists hang against the shimmering gray-tauped walls of the dining room, near an assortment of Wedgwood basalt objects and medieval arms bows. As for the large nautical-theme painting adorning the front hall like a prized tapestry, Gambrel explains that it likely came out of a Maryland chowder house. "We really didn't want a house that felt like it belonged to any place or era other than the West Village."
In one guest room, the vintage parchment-covered bed is French and the custom-made bedding is by Casa Del Bianco. Facing page, from top: The open shower in the master bath is sheathed in travertine; the fixtures in the sink and shower are by Lefroy Brooks. The chest of drawers is by René Drouet; See Resources.

right now,” the designer insists. “I’m always a little let down by homes that immediately betray an owner’s passion for French Deco or whatever. A bit of suspense is good.” One of his own passions is readily evident, although subtle: paint colors. The clover green that brightens the front hall matches a shade spotted at Thorvaldsens Museum in Copenhagen, a neoclassical shrine to the Danish sculptor. And on a trip to India, while Gambrel and Connor’s fellow sightseers in Jaipur marveled at the Amber Palace’s mirror-encrusted reception rooms, the men preferred to hang out in the royal residence’s lovely administrative offices, photographing and sketching the striped walls that would end up inspiring the boldly painted bands in the vestibule of their townhouse. As he does for many of his projects, Gambrel designed much of the upholstered furniture. Especially striking is a suite of luxuriously deep sofas and armchairs in the second floor’s grand blue-on-blue-on-black living room, which spans the full width of the
The small guest room's custom-made bed linens are by Celine Del Bianco; the Roman shades are of a Rome cotton-linen, and the walls are covered in vintage-look from Uzbekistan. Facing page, from top: Etchings by an unknown French artist hang in the guest bath above custom-made ideas by Urban Archaeology. In the master bedroom, the bed is designed by Gamble, and the Roman shades are made of a Mckiam fabric from Holly Hunt. See Resources.

The people who built these houses knew how to live well in them,” Gamble asserts with a smile. “We hope to follow their example.”