

# BIG CITY GL

Sara Story's eclectic Gramercy Park home puts the designer and her family in a New York state of mind.

by SUE HOSTETLER photographs by ERIC STRIFFLER

As Frank Sinatra (and then Jay-Z) famously proclaimed, if you can make it in New York, you can make it anywhere. If that's true, interior designer Sara Story is primed to take on the world. Since opening her namesake firm in 2003, Story has quickly gone from design world up-and-comer to full-fledged mover and shaker. Her eclectic aesthetic and global flair reflect an international upbringing (Japan, Singapore, Houston) and have made her the current designer of choice for well-heeled New Yorkers.

After studying interior architecture at San Francisco's Academy of Art, Story moved to Manhattan in 2001 and



Sara Story in the living room of her Gramercy Park home.



# AMOUR



Sunlight streams into the Persian-blue living room, outfitted with a pair of cashmere-covered chairs and a white lacquer coffee table. Exquisite matching Paul Mathieu horsehair side chairs flank a Karl Springer snakeskin telephone table.



Story's stenciled pattern on the kitchen floor makes ordinary wood planks extraordinary. A painted Chinese altar table is paired with oversize black lacquer chairs for a casual dining area. The light fixture is by Lona Design, the painting on the far wall is by Alison Blickle and the metal flower vases Story found at Eskander in Paris.

worked for respected designer Victoria Hagan, whom she credits with teaching her how to run an efficient business. "The creativity is a small part of the business—the fun part, but a small part of the overall day-to-day of executing jobs." A commission to renovate a Fifth Avenue pied-à-terre provided the catalyst for Story to strike out on her own.

Story's own apartment, within an 1850s brownstone once occupied by Dr. Valentine Mott, the founder of Bellevue Hospital and NYU Medical School, provides an ideal behind-the-scenes glimpse into her timeless yet whimsical style. Overlooking the serenity of Gramercy Park—one of only two private parks left in New York City—Story combined three apartments over the last few years to create a multilevel, 3,000-square-foot home for herself and her three children, Duke, aged 7, Edward, 3, and Dagny, 1. The atmosphere is that of an Asian aristocrat's Parisian salon: A bold color palette (think red lacquer), splashes of elegant patterned wallpaper, photos of Coco Chanel's French atelier and dozens of Eastern *objets decoratifs* give the space a delightfully big presence.

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“A lot of the furniture I found all over the world... Buenos Aires, Thailand, France, Italy,” Story offers. The designer deftly mixes time periods, textures and price points; vintage pieces from iconic designers, such as a divine Karl Springer snakeskin telephone table, blend seamlessly with more inexpensive items. The exotic mash-up is most evident in the stunning library, where antique rugs from Morocco and Turkey are paired with a Jacque Adnet daybed, an Italian bar unit from the 1950s and pillows covered with fabric from Japanese kimonos.

Known for her distinctive and infectious laugh, Story might be most refreshing for her ability to *not* take herself too seriously. Her work seems to be executed with a sly wink and a smile (see the line of clever Burmese monk statues standing sentry in front of the fireplace).

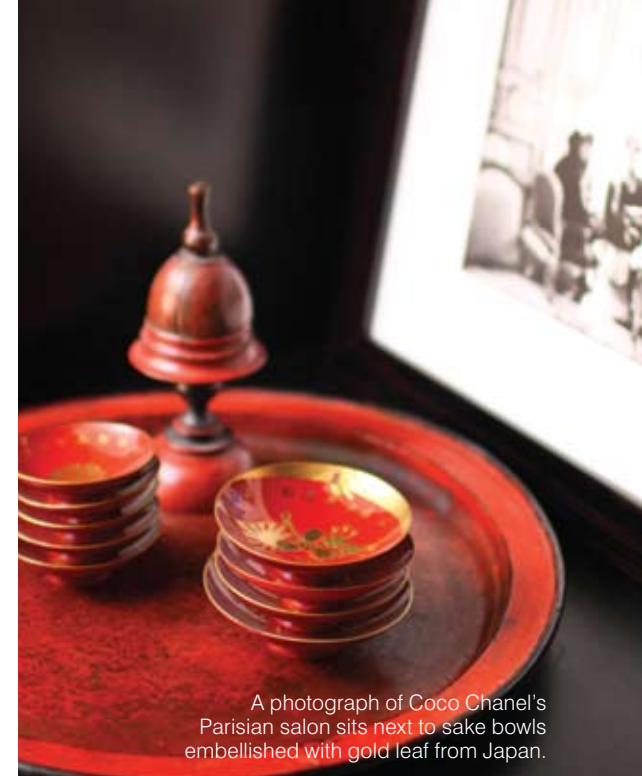
“My favorite room is the master,” says Story. “It’s where we congregate to read, play games and watch movies. And the red Moroccan bathroom with red paneling—it’s very chic and fun.”



Antique wine openers collected on travels to Spain, Morocco and England adorn a tray from Bangkok.



Delicate crystal and silver match strikers from London



A photograph of Coco Chanel's Parisian salon sits next to sake bowls embellished with gold leaf from Japan.



Antique wool rugs from Morocco and Turkey mix with a Jacques Adnet daybed outfitted with pillows made from Japanese kimonos, giving the library the feel of a sophisticated international bazaar.

The master bedroom, with its cream rug, drapes and velvet headboard, is a study in tranquility. Custom bedding is from Casa Del Bianco; the painting is by Will Cotton.





One of Story's favorite rooms is the Moroccan-inspired bathroom, which features tile imported from Marrakech and custom red paneled walls. The picture is a flea-market find.



Story's dressing area features custom cabinetry filled with family photos. A painted American side chair from the early 1900s has been updated with a linen seat cushion.



The children's playroom features black lacquer wallpaper by Silk Dynasty, a pink Muriel Brandolini ottoman and artwork by Ricci Albenda.

A growing collection of contemporary art—mostly languid portrait paintings—dots the walls of the three-bedroom, four-bath home. “My first serious purchase was two Elizabeth Peytons, before she hit it big,” Story says. One of the most treasured is surely the ephemeral portrait Will Cotton painted of her. “I love portraiture, but I am trying to expand my vision!” the designer laughs.

Not surprisingly the proximity to world-class art, as well as other cultural pleasures, is what Story loves most about living in Gotham. “The exposure to everything is my favorite part,” she says. “The fashion shows, furniture galleries, fabric representatives, restaurants and the international crowd... you see everything that is happening, and you are part of the trends.”

Story also appreciates the gutsy nature of her big-city clientele. “I think my clients are more adventuresome and willing to take chances,” she offers. “A lot of my clients are entrepreneurs and are willing to trust me to know when it’s appropriate to take a risk.”

One has to wonder what’s next for the designer (named a rising star by the International Furnishings and Design Association), who has already tackled the legendary Kips Bay Decorator Showhouse and is currently working on seven projects in places as diverse as Connecticut, San Francisco and Texas. “A boutique hotel in Asia or Europe,” Story easily responds. “That is what I want! After doing show houses in New York, I realized I love when my design work is public, to talk to people in the space and explain it, to get feedback, to share it.” Lucky for us. **G**