

The AVANTE- GARDE

Designer and art dealer Gilles Clement transforms a Purchase home for a family of five into an internationally inspired jewel box, complete with a covetable art collection.

BY GINA VALENTINO



In the living room, an Il Pezzo Mancante lighting fixture, mixed-media artwork by Natalia Kidiashvili, and hand-selected accessories create a luxurious feel.



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hen you spot a Colonial in the suburbs, you might expect to see a particular design scheme within. After all, it makes sense for the exterior to match the interior, right?

Au contraire, says accomplished designer Gilles Clement of Gilles Clement Designs in Greenwich. "It doesn't matter where you live; it matters who you are. A lot of people get caught up in 'Oh, I live in Westchester County, or I live in Greenwich, so I have to respect the architectural style' — and it's not true." While he admits that a home with a completely different feel from others in a neighborhood might be a harder sell, Clement contends, "It doesn't mean you can't do it."

Clement's creativity and predisposition for bold decor are what set apart his distinct design, which is infused with European flair and global influences. The Parisian native is also an art dealer and owns an eponymous gallery in Greenwich. "My look in Greenwich is pretty ballsy — you know, let's just say the truth," Clement says, bluntly. As such, he is accustomed to a particular type of client, one he typically expects to persuade when it comes to daring decor.

"Art is the soul of the home."

So, when a shopper entered his gallery a few years ago and purchased a striking Visionnaire console on a day that he wasn't there, he was intrigued. "It's not a common piece at all, and it's pretty pricy. Usually, I sell these kinds of pieces through my design projects. It's very unusual that someone would walk in and buy that."

Continuing, he says, "Someone who understands that certain sensibility, without there being any sales or educational help to understand the look and why it's so great, piqued my curiosity to meet her."

He went with his movers to the client's home in Purchase. A delivery that was supposed to have taken 15 minutes lasted three hours. "We sat down and started talking," says Clement. "This is how I found out she needed much more than the console." She was seeking to renovate her home.

Clement says he found an appreciative muse in his client. "She lived in Manhattan for many years and always had strong interest in design — as much in fashion as in home. She's someone who's very keen and curious about the beauty and aesthetics one can become amazed by in this world," he says. "She already had matured a certain taste over the years on her own, just by lifestyle. She travels a lot. She went to Europe. She stayed in a lot of beautiful boutique hotels." As a result, his client reacted strongly to his gallery. "She wanted to buy the entire store; she couldn't believe how much she loved it."

Clement's gallery reflects his affinities as a designer: He is known for mixing old and new, respecting a home yet reinventing it in a contemporary fashion. His curated art collection, like his design selections, has international influences. His gallery brims with artists like Georgian-born David Datuna, London-based Debra Franses Bean, French natives Clement Kamena, American creator Devorah Sperber, and Canadian Curtis Cutshaw. Clement describes his design style as transitional and contemporary: "opulent and luxurious but definitely transitional and contemporary." And the art, furniture, and decor he houses at his gallery reflect that feel.

Of his clientele, Clement shares, "I feel that once they appreciate that sensibility on that aesthetic design level, there is a large chance that they will feel the same way about the art. With the exception of perhaps two percent, my clientele end up purchasing art from me at the end."

He adorned this Purchase home with exquisite art in the form of mixed-media works, lighting fixtures, and furniture.

The jumping-off point for the home, a Visionnaire console, from Italy, decorates the hallway. Created with black, beveled glass, it has chains waterfaling on both sides. "It's very bold and a very special character piece," Clement shares. He adds that he has a lot of respect for American clients for their willingness to educate themselves about art and aesthetics. "I wouldn't be surprised if, in Paris, someone buys this console. But here, I am. It was really intriguing to

In the foyer of this Purchase estate, a sculpture by Edgar Askelevic greets guests, along with a spectacular chandelier.



Below: The Visionnaire console connected the designer and client, allowing for the renovation of this Purchase home. **Right:** The kitchen features intricate design details and accommodates the large family.



me that I didn't need to be involved in this one sale to convince the client why it's so great — that she loved it so much on her own."

Above the console is a three-dimensional rendition by Clement Kamena of Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, part of the French natives' Jar Memory series. It's no coincidence: Clement Kamena are Gilles Clement's parents, Serge Clement and Marina Kamena. "They interpreted their own version of [Vermeer's oil painting]," explains Clement, "so you can collect the art in the jar. Their entire concept [for their Jar Memory series] was to take masterpieces of art history and close them in jars so that people can collect the jars and own a part of art history. It's very well painted and very well realized — not because it's my parents. Trust me, if I didn't love their work, they wouldn't be in my gallery.



I would never jeopardize my artistic integrity.

"I really like their work," he continues. "It's in complete sync with my perspective, which is kind of normal, because we are from the same family, so we kind of share the same vision on certain things, especially when it comes to the arts and aesthetics."

Surrounding the artwork in this home are two pendants by Italian lighting company Terzani. Each pendant has seven balls of handblown crystal.

In the living room, family ties continue. The lighting fixture is from Il Pezzo Mancante (the owner of this Italian-based lighting brand is the brother of the owner of Terzani). The chandelier in the living room is made from handblown crystal balls. Between each crystal junction to the black metal rod, there is a little circle of polished nickel. Clement says, "It's like

a double-finish chandelier because it has polished nickel and black powder-coated lacquer rods." Light shines through the crystal from the rod. "The light shines through the crystal from the rod." Brightly, Clement says, "It's really spectacular in person."

Clement Kamena's Jar Memory series is again found here, with a representation of Jeff Koons' *Diamond*. Clement felt this piece was the right scale, color, and vibe for the room, and the multifaceted diamond serves as a unique focal point. "You can get intricately lost in it. It was interesting to see how they could take a sculpture and make it feel three-dimensional, through the painting."

Additional artwork in the living room includes a piece from Natalia Kldiashvili, a Georgian artist fascinated by the life of Coco Chanel. On the sides of the

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starburst are newspaper clippings, magazines, and documents from the 1940s–60s that chronicle the life of Chanel. The left side is in French; the right side, English. All the pieces in and around the logo are collages: accessories, buttons, fashion items, to tie the mixed-media piece together.

The luxurious rug in the space was made in Nepal from genuine silk. Of the metallic blanket, Clement says, “It’s really cool because the way it falls onto things, it breaks into little triangles, so it gives a really interesting feel and look.” Clement often will purchase fabric (“the more unique, the better” he says) from vendors and create distinctive throws and blankets in his workshop. The distinguishing Klismos chairs are “Hollywood glamour style,” made from black piano lacquer. Clement explains they have a “very feminine shape and very masculine finish. It’s unusual.”

Feathers — adorning the living room’s pillows (real rooster) — are Clement’s signature. The homeowner’s personal art collection complemented this. In the powder room, a photograph of a woman wearing a garment with ostrich feathers elevates the space. Clement says his client inquired before they started the project if they should incorporate the fashion-forward image in the home’s new design. “I said yes, absolutely,” recalls Clement, and he curated the powder room around the image, taking into account the black and ivory hues and the model’s golden tresses, translating the color palette to the decor, despite the square footage.

While some counter that dark paint has the potential to close up a small space, Clement declares: “A powder room doesn’t have to feel grand... feel grand in style, yes; feel grand in space, no.

“For me,” he continues, “it was more about creating a jewelry box, something really pleasant and sultry and chic and sophisticated.”

To accomplish that sophistication, the designer chose a mosaic brass-tile floor, which complements the Maison Valentina vanity. From Portugal, the vanity features a mix of lacquered and brass balls (the top is imprinted wood on brass). A gold sink and faucet complete it. The photo inspired unexpected design choices. “I know the black toilet is a little ballsy. I know some people hate them. But for me, a white toilet there would make no sense — it would bring attraction to the toilet because it would have contrasted with the wallpaper and black wall. I never try to bring attention to a toilet, so the



The dining room features video art from MARCK, along with exquisite furnishings.





black in this instance was the proper choice." Elaborating, he says, "It melts with the design, and it's discreet and sophisticated." The wallpaper, handmade in Japan with real gold leaf, is by Studio Zen. The diamond-shaped lighting fixture hails from Holland.

Stylish lighting is an essential characteristic of Gilles Clement Designs: "A good interior design job is made of a lot of small things that create the puzzle, and everything is important, but lighting, in my opinion, is probably the most important," he says, adding, "a lot of the lighting fixtures I choose are very sculptural, very artistic, made by artisans. Most of them come from Europe." His propensity for viewing lighting as an artist statement is evident in the home's grand kitchen. Prior to the reno, the kitchen was outdated and lacking functionality, says Clement. The client, who sought a contemporary and luxurious feel for the space, was Clement's inspiration. "I wanted to give her lighting that looked like jewelry, because she has a lot of amazing jewelry. I wanted to carry on her sense of fashion and her sense of glamour throughout the kitchen."

Clement adeptly accomplished this by personally designing the chandeliers that anchor the space. "Originally, I had the starting inspiration point from Brand van Egmond, from Amsterdam, but that brand's lighting was very expensive, and my clients wanted something they could get faster. They asked if I could do a version of it that was appropriate in scale to the islands. I came up with my own version and had them custom-made in Canada."

Also custom-designed was the cabinetry, built in Clement's workshop. Piano lacquer with brass inserts in the molding make them unique.

Clement says, "I've done so many kitchens in the past in silver-and-white and silver-and-gray, and I like to reinvent myself." To reflect his client's stylish vibe and execute his penchant for cutting-edge design, he selected a backsplash that is a mixture of solid brass and Nero Marquina marble.

For the family of five with frequently visiting grandparents, Clement doubled the size of the kitchen, to roughly 750 square feet (including the nearby breakfast nook) and reconfigured the space for more practical use. He opted for two islands, seating six, and the breakfast nook seats an additional six. (The kitchen wasn't originally suited to host that many people; "I had to work my magic to break the walls, some load-bearing," says Clement.) The islands are Calacatta Gold Ultra Quartz. "Very few people still do marble islands or countertops, because of the maintenance," Clement elaborates. He shares that the islands are special because they have waterfall edges, and they are angled. "This

is something I've honestly never seen," shares Clement. Two of the four corners of each island are angled on a diagonal, because when he expanded the kitchen, one of the walls was protruding. The wall with the ovens and warming drawer protrudes farther out than the other wall. "I carried that angle on the edge of the islands, so not only is it very functional when you walk because they are perpendicular to each other; it is also a design that is unique and a novelty, which is always nice."

The floor features oversized tiles: 36" x 48" Italian ceramic, with Calacatta Gold Ultra veining. The kitchen opens into the breakfast nook, which dons an impressive chandelier from Italian luxury brand Paolo Castelli. The ceiling is custom silver-leaf finish, and the Roman shades are a sheer fabric intended to pick up the veining on the Calacatta floor. "The idea was to mix the greige that's on the floor and the countertop with the Roman shade and introduce this gold." Clement says that not many kitchens featured gold when he started designing this project a few years ago. "I've always been at the forefront of using brass in my design. It's always been challenging introducing clients to it because brass has the connotation of being a traditional material. At the time, I was one of the first ones to create and make pieces with brass when everybody was doing polished nickel and chrome."

The nook is complete with Portuguese finds: brass chairs and a Nero Maquina round table with brass leaf on the top and brass on the pedestal.

The opulence continues in the dining room. The chandelier and sconces are by Terzani, wallpaper by Elitis, and the fabric of the curtains is by Gretchen Bellinger. The table and chairs are custom; the fabric of the chairs is by Romo Zinc. The rug is by the designer himself. Here, the art is elevated to a new level. Rather than typical still art, Clement selected video artwork for this space, by MARCK from Switzerland, which is best appreciated in person.

Elsewhere on the first floor, Clement added an opulent bar, laundry room with ample storage and two washers and dryers, and a mudroom with a study area.

While the family doesn't often enter and exit through the foyer, it shines bright like a diamond. The floor is marble (Clement agreed to incorporate marble here rather than quartz, because "Ninety-nine percent of the time, the family comes through the garage like everyone else in any other house. Because it's not a high-traffic area, I thought marble was the way to go for this one, and black with white veins is really what I wanted because it is consistent with the design of the kitchen and all the rooms we'd redone," shares Clement. The real



This page and opposite:
The designer took cues from the artwork above to create an elevated aesthetic in the powder room.

The breakfast nook off the kitchen offers additional seating for a large family. *Opposite page:* The bar features a bold design.



standout here is the sculpture by Edgar Askelovic, a Millennial artist from Lithuania. The life-size sculpture, inspired by Jean-Michel Basquiat, is part of Askelovic's Rihanna series (he gifted the Grammy Award winner with a handcrafted silicone sculpture of herself for her 30th birthday). Clement acknowledges, "It's a really unique and interesting piece. I wanted to do something unique and not have to again put some flowers or a vase and just try to be innovative by putting something that's unexpected" in the space.

Also unanticipated here is the choice of lighting. "I wanted the chandelier to waterfall really low because most people would put the chandelier all the way up," he says. "I often break the rules with the heights of lighting. [Like in the living room, whose fixture waterfalls right on top of the cocktail table.] These are very unusual heights, but I do it because I feel that very often lighting is a great way to anchor a setting. If the lighting is too high, you lose that," he adds. "In this case [the foyer], the metal chandelier falls literally an inch over the sculpture's head, which was curated for that purpose. It makes it very interesting and an unusual introduction to the house when you arrive."

In the foreground is David Datuna's Black USA Flag. Part of the Georgian artist's well-known Viewpoint of Millions series, the mixed-media piece features Datuna's signature technique of using optical lenses over large-scaled layered, collaged, and painted images, with the surface both concealing and revealing the work below. This work by Datuna, a treasure, adds to the esteemed collection of this Westchester estate.

Clement recognizes that there are many important art collections and art enthusiasts in Westchester, and through his design firm and gallery, his focus is to create elegant spaces with mood-enhancing art, in both the traditional sense and through decor and furnishings.

"We live in a difficult world, with a lot of struggles and challenges to overcome every day. For me, your home is really the place you are able to recharge and feel safe. I think it's a very important part of our lives, our homes, and I believe that making your environment more beautiful has a gigantic consequence on your mood and the way you feel about yourself.

"I believe that by creating a beautiful environment for people, it improves their lives," the designer continues. "A beautiful environment needs substance. Furniture, lighting, wallpapers, and fabrics are part of that process of embellishment and of fulfillment. Art can fulfill the need of someone aesthetically and intellectually and emotionally. Art is the soul of the home." ■■

