

# The New York Times

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## ThursdayStyles

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KENDRICK BRINSON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

## A Country Club, Chic Again

The Marrakesh is a desert oasis where time stands still and hair doesn't frizz.

By PETER HALDEMAN

**PALM DESERT, CALIF.** — It was Jingle Mingle Night at the Marrakesh Country Club. Inside its serpentine pink walls, past the entry gazebo's cone roof, up the drive flanked by petunia beds and olive trees clipped like standard poodles, a line of cars disgorged

guests swathed in Santa suits and stocking caps and sweaters with blinking LED lights. Inside the clubhouse, waiters in red and green argyle took drink orders, and a couple dozen couples of a certain age grooved to Wild Cherry's "Play that Funky Music." But note the table by the dance floor, the one filled with (relatively) young men in sober

(by comparison) dark blazers. If their youth and their attire weren't conspicuous enough, there was the matter of their conversation. Sawing into a slab of prime rib, Stephen Drucker, the former editor of several lifestyle publications, announced that he had

Annie Selke at her home in the Marrakesh community in Palm Desert, Calif.

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## This Academy Is His Can of Soup



David Kratz was flanked by Donna Karan and Greg Unis at the Tribeca Ball. NINA WESTERVELT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

David Kratz leads an art school Warhol helped found.

By JACOB BERNSTEIN

At the New York Academy of Art's annual Tribeca Ball this month, it was hard to move without smacking into someone famous and thin. Naomi Watts was decked out in a sleeveless blue sateen dress from Stella McCartney. Gina Gershon had on a black goat-hair bolero and made a beeline for Brooke Shields. Real Housewives hovered, students sketched live falcons, and an accordionist in a top hat serenaded the guests. A little more than a decade ago, this 100-student, two-year graduate program founded in part by Andy Warhol in 1982 seemed as timeworn as the creaky five-floor loft building on Franklin Street in which it has its headquarters. CONTINUED ON PAGE D4



DANNY GHITS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

**Design Envy**  
The Kips Bay Decorator Show House puts Pinterest's interiors to shame. By Penelope Green, Page 7.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANNY GHITIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

# Such Rooms as Dreams Are Made On

Decorators summon their muses for a show house on the Upper East Side.

By PENELOPE GREEN

In contrast to the many giddy and upbeat fantasies being enacted in the rooms of this year's Kips Bay Decorator Show House — in its 45th year, still a happy raspberry to minimalism — is a shadowy bedroom designed by Billy Cotton for a fictitious female client way, way down on her luck.

In his imagining, she was holed up in the attic bedroom of an S.R.O. hotel, a former grande dame in a once grand house. “She’s had all sort of tragedies, some self-inflicted,” he said, and she is living out her

days in donated finery from her design friends: a spangly pillow on a LeLeu armchair, a leopard-print carpet, the novels of Graham Greene.

As he imagined her life and habitat, Mr. Cotton, one of 18 designers whose work is spread out among the five floors of a brick Georgian townhouse, was thinking about decoration and the decorator, not a term people embrace much anymore.

He said he wanted to investigate the profession’s legacy as a haven for creative gay men, and the sometimes profoundly intimate relationship between a female client and her male interior designer. (Mr. Cotton’s clients — artists like Cindy Sherman and Lisa Yuskavage — are in opposition to this dame in the attic, having challenged society, and done very nicely as a result.) And



he was expressing nostalgia — for a time he never knew, actually, since Mr. Cotton is only 35 — for when Manhattan was more than just a billionaire’s playground.

Is decorating on this scale archaic? Can we find meaning in the feathered nests of

Above, Kirsten Fitzgibbons and Kelli Ford made a contemporary gilded-age living room, with reflective surfaces and touches of gold (even the birch logs in the fireplace are gilded). “Honestly, we just wanted to make something that was happy, and would appeal to both men and women,” Ms. Fitzgibbons said. Left, the Canadian firm Powell & Bonnell cleaned up the marble in the entryway and flanked it with a pair of bronze antelopes.

the superwealthy?

“The practice of decorating in its highest form is a communal exercise,” Mr. Cotton said. “You have fine artists whose paintings hang on the wall. Fabric made by people in a tradition that goes back centuries,” and countless artisans — gilders, upholsterers, muralists, textile artists, metalworkers — whose crafts and skills would be lost without the patronage of the very rich, and the work of the decorators who orchestrate the objects of all that skill into a coherent and lovely whole. Or at the very least keep foundry fires burning.

*The Kips Bay Decorator Show House is open through June 1 at 125 East 65th Street; \$40, 212-755-5733, kipsbaydecoratorshowhouse.org.*



These ravishing flowers are by Ken Fulk's Flower Factory, part of the design team overseen by Ken Fulk, the home stager turned event planner turned Silicon Valley decorator. Here, Mr. Fulk imagined a dining room for a grande dame who had outlived three husbands and was enjoying her solitude until she was visited by several escapees from a local zoo, including a monkey, a zebra and a polar bear (see the hand-painted de Gournay wallpaper for details).



For decades, the house was the headquarters of the China Institute in America. In the backyard, there was a traditional Chinese garden, with pebble mosaic paving and a herd of scholar's rocks. Janice Parker, a landscape architect, planted a thicket of bamboo and fashioned a moon gate from green pussy willow branches, among other interventions that recall, she said, the influences of Tony Duquette, Bermuda, China and Hollywood. "The place was so derelict, we've been power washing it for weeks," she said. "But it was so beautifully done."



"I had to find a muse," said Susan Ferrier of McAlpine, whose first moves in this bedroom involved a collection of archaeological prints, left. "A little romance." Who are we romancing? "A league of extraordinary male archaeologists," she said. And so, a bed-sitter for a meeting of the Explorers Club, swagged with smoky green velvet curtains behind which, Ms. Ferrier said, "is some very confused architecture, a window and a few false doors; we just had to calm it down."



Lauren Kruegel and Ross Alexander, design directors at Robert A. M. Stern Architects Interiors, were inspired by the Villa Necchi, the 1930s-era Milanese house that is a star of the lush 2009 film "I Am Love," along with Tilda Swinton, who plays a wealthy, frozen wife on the brink of being thawed by an affair. Their custom-made bright green velvet sofa is as luxurious as Ms. Swinton's wardrobe. The tomato red plates hung below the mantel are by Gio Ponti.