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STYLE COMPASS: **DARREN HENAULT** | By Susanna Salk

## HIS FIRST BIG CLIENT WAS THE LEGENDARY MUSICIAN MEAT LOAF.

His three-year-old twin daughters are named Lulu and Bunny. He lives with his partner, corporate lawyer Michael Bassett, in a 19th-century Fifth Avenue robber baron maisonette with mahogany paneling and a living room so resplendent one expects Edith Wharton to arrive at any moment for tea. And yet the most telling signposts of Henault's personality are found elsewhere: That his girls are allowed to have their meals on the white-silk sofa in the dining room, spills be damned. That it wasn't the added perk of a subterranean wine cellar (which still remains empty of bottles) but the proximity of the Central Park Zoo just across the street that lured him to the apartment. That he curls up on an extra-long, camelback sofa shoeless and in jeans for a hearty chat.

Darren Henault updated the living room of the Fifth Avenue apartment he shares with his partner, Michael Bassett, and their two daughters, using Andre Arbus and Jansen furnishings. Photo by Marco Ricca. Previous page: The New York-based interior designer Darren Henault. Photo by Joshua McHugh

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**H**enault was born and raised in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, where his father owned several successful textile companies. After college, he worked briefly at a Boston architecture firm and then moved to New York for an international marketing job at Young & Rubicam. Yet the design fates intervened when Henault was vacationing in the South of France with his friend Marion and her family, including her father, the architect Norman Rosenfeld. "I had been commenting on the colors, shapes and décor of everything we were seeing without realizing it," says Henault, which prompted Rosenfeld to challenge him about why he wasn't an interior designer. Henault didn't give the observation too much thought and returned to the daily grind of the job he had come to hate.

To enhance the graphic look of a room Henault created for the Rumson Stately Homes by the Sea showhouse in New Jersey last year, he custom-wrapped the books on the shelves in cream and gold vellum. Photo by Marco Ricca



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**B**ut shortly thereafter, thanks to Rosenfeld's continued urging, Henault found himself enrolled in an interior design studio course at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT). At the outset he was skeptical, but three weeks into the first class, he quit his job. "I finally felt totally in my element," explains Henault, "Even the business classes were interesting!"

Henault's first gig came in 1996 when a friend asked him to snazz up her Mercer Street apartment. This wasn't his first creative assignment: He'd already acquired a following for the slipcovers he'd been making ever since he had arrived in Manhattan and purchased a sewing machine. ("My father had entire factories filled with machines that made things," he explains. "A sewing machine seemed small potatoes after jacquard looms and industrial-size dye vats.") For the Mercer Street undertaking, he covered most of the loft in white duck cloth. "It was the first and only time I've ever done the all-white thing," says Henault, who was meanwhile converting his own tiny West Village apartment by installing live sheet moss on the bathroom walls and covering his bedroom in Japanese paper from Kate's Paperie in Soho.

Henault at work in his New York office. Photo by Joshua McHugh

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Henault and Bassett used to live in this outsize Soho loft but moved uptown after having kids - and they brought much of their furniture with them. Photo by Durston Saylor

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**F**rom the beginning I had a love of textures," says Henault. "I think that was thanks to my father, who would always touch something before he would give an opinion about it. He taught me that you don't only see with your eyes." It was a good thing Henault had already made himself a set of business cards that read "Interior Designer." Soon he had so much work that he had to leave FIT after two years to officially begin his new career.

But it was his work in 1997 for the musician and actor Meat Loaf and his wife that propelled him onto the main stage. After a short interview, Henault was hired to decorate their Lincoln Center duplex from scratch. "They had rock-star taste and I had carte blanche," says Henault of the project, the first of six he's worked on for them. "I did a very rich, very urban kind of scheme, lots of dense jacquards and brocades. It all had to be intense to match his personality."

Meat Loaf and his wife, who are among Henault's most loyal clients, wanted a room in their Beverly Hills home devoted to hosting the children of visiting friends. Photo by Mark Lohman

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At his house in Millbrook, New York, Henault transformed a former dirt shed into a "library bath" (far left) and adorned a 19th-century iron-and-brass guest-room bed (left) with printed fabric from Les Indiennes and linens by Leron. A Swedish nightstand from Lief stands by. Photos by Durston Saylor

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**T**oday Henault and his team of four are based in a white, minimalist office on West 55th Street. Currently, they're working on a three-story townhouse on the West Side refurbished by Ike Kligerman Barkley Architects that, according to Henault, "is going to be insane," thanks in part to a bleached-oak spiral staircase encased in Venetian stucco. They're also working on the redecoration of a historic 42,000-square-foot Beaux Arts mansion up the Hudson designed by Carrère and Hastings. It will, of course, feature traditional décor. Anything else, says Henault, "would be like spitting in church."

His firm is also branching out, joining forces with Michael Goldman, an architect who was formerly the senior design associate in Thierry Despont's architectural department. They opened a second office last year in San Francisco headed by designer Liana Blechinger. "Once we had the twins I didn't want to travel so much," explains Henault. "So this is an ideal way to continue to pursue our projects on the West Coast."

The living room of a West Village townhouse — with its hand-knotted silk rug, taffeta curtains edged with a hand-appliqued, golf filament pattern, and a pair of 1940s French water gilt wooden framed bergères in Christopher Hyland silk velvet — demonstrates Henault's love of texture. Photo by Joshua McHugh



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In the den of the same townhouse, a Roman Thomas sofa is covered in a handwoven silk rug that doubles as elegant upholstery. Photo by Joshua McHugh

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**A**mid an ongoing flurry of undertakings, Henault maintains that family time is essential. The Henault-Bassett clan escapes most weekends to a farmhouse in Millbrook, New York, set on 50 acres, which they share with two horses and the girls' snow-white pony, Cloud. The house is filled with well-loved and worn antiques and guests are encouraged to have a seat and not worry about taking off their riding boots. In fact, a mutual love for all things equestrian initially sealed Henault and Bassett's coupledness. "Our first date was a little tepid until Michael told me he had just won his division at the Hampton Classic," says Henault, who has also been riding since he was a boy. "I was over-the-moon impressed." Fourteen years later, the men are as besotted with parenthood. "I know it's a cliché to say that your children are a gift but it's true," says Henault. "The intense love we feel knocks us off of our feet."

Top: Henault and Bassett go fox hunting every weekend of the season in Millbrook. Photo by Pat Ike. Bottom: The four-year-old twins Bunny and Lulu, wearing coats by Marie Chantal and sunglasses by Disney, window shop on Madison Avenue. Photo by Nelly Restrepo



# Style Compass

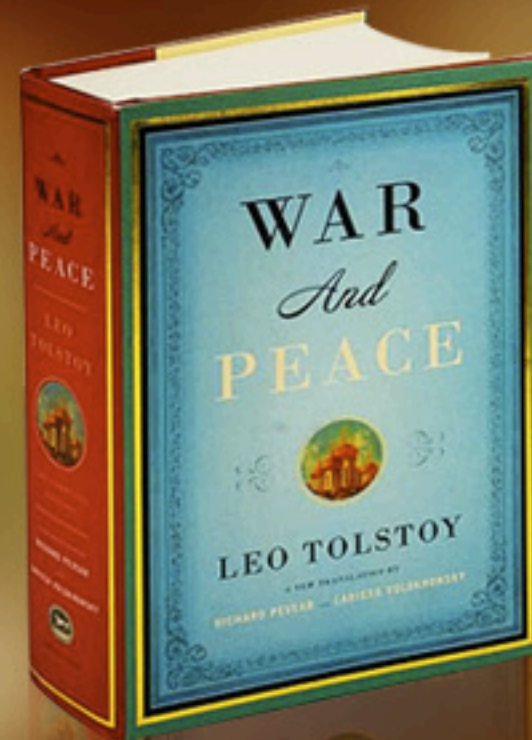


## MUSEUM

The [Frick Collection](#) in New York.

## BOOK

[War and Peace](#) (seriously! read it again).



## FASHION

I prefer English-tailored with a touch of the Mad Hatter.

## ENTERTAINING

A group of friends around my new stone firepit in the middle of a field in Millbrook, New York, on a cold fall or spring day with sandwiches, nice wine and good linens.

## HOW GREEN ARE YOU?

If antiques are green then I'm emerald.

## MUSIC CD

Adele, "21."

## COLOR

Anything from Farrow & Ball, a paint and wallpaper store in New York.



## GARDENING OR FLORAL

I spent one fall weekend with my garden designers, Tony Beilaczyc and Kevin King, planning next spring. They've planted an additional 6,000 bulbs. I can't wait.

## RESTAURANT

Auberge de la Loube in Buoux, France.

## HOTEL

[JK Place](#) in Florence (so chic).



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An Empire gilt and patinated Nike figure wall clock, offered by H.M. Luther, Inc.



A Mariano Fortuny black stenciled velvet long coat, offered by Fortuny



An antique French settee, offered by Metropolis Modern



A pair of antique earrings made from gold, coral and onyx, offered by Kentshire Galleries



A three-door cabinet inlaid with mother of pearl and ebony by Jules Leleu, offered by Maison Gérard

# DARREN HENAUULT

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