

# LEDEDECOR

smart  
and  
sexy

## FASHION AT HOME

HOW THE RUNWAY'S BRIGHTEST  
STARS LIVE NOW

VALENTINO'S GLITTERING GALA

THE BEAUTY OF BLACK

FEARLESS ROOMS,  
FABULOUS STYLE

OCTOBER 2007  
USA \$4.99/CANADA \$5.99  
LEDECOR.COM



# GLAMOROUS!





Valesca Guerrand-Hermès, wearing a Douglas Hannant gown, on the staircase of her New York apartment. See Resources.





# la bohème

For Valesca Guerrand-Hermès  
and her young children,  
home is a quirky Manhattan enclave with a  
rich, artistic history

*Text by Vicky Lowry*

*Photography by William Waldron*

*Produced by Carlos Mota*

Some buildings are so special (as in odd) that they attract only the most like-minded of tenants (as in unconventional). In other words, they're not for everyone. Hotel des Artistes, a Gothic-style enclave on Manhattan's Upper West Side, is a perfect example. Apartment hunters in search of endless closet space, enough bathrooms to ensure privacy for everyone in the family, and gargantuan professional-style kitchens should look elsewhere. In fact, when the ten-floor co-op was built in 1917 as a haven for artists, none of the high-ceilinged apartments even had kitchens. There was, however, a spectacular copper-clad elevator, swimming pool, squash court, sun parlor, restaurant, and, of course, fabulous expanses of glass designed to give its creative residents the very best natural light.

"Hotel des Artistes is an extravagant place, designed for people who wanted to be different," says resident Valesca Guerrand-Hermès. The Canada-born

beauty and mother of two is happily ensconced in a building that generations of creative types once called home, including the playwright Noël Coward, several silent-film stars, and a swashbuckling explorer who is rumored to be an inspiration for Indiana Jones. As for its idiosyncratic, vaguely medieval mien, she says, "If you get it, you'll love it."

What's easy to get in her bright, sunny duplex is the dramatic impact of the double-height windows, which bathe the rooms in a soothing lemony glow. "It changes your mood to wake up to so much light," says Guerrand-Hermès, the founder of Babies Come First, a charity that cares for abandoned infants in partnership with Harlem's celebrated Hale House. "It makes you automatically smile."

There are plenty of other happy-making touches that are original to the three-bedroom apartment, which Guerrand-Hermès shares with her children, Lucien and Cléa, and their Jack Russell, Kiko. Such



In the living area, a pair of custom-made sofas, chairs and a side table from the Pippa collection by Hermès, and an antique cocktail table; the light fixture is Moroccan, and the large painting is *Silence* by Philippe Pasqua. Facing page: The antique dining table and chairs are English. See Resources.







as creaking wood floors and Tudor-style beams with just the right lived-in look. A sweeping mahogany staircase leads to the bedrooms and a balcony worthy of the Opéra Garnier. A coffered ceiling flaunts a rainbow of flamboyant hues. And gilded plaster and gold leaf are everywhere—on columns, overhead, even inside the coat closet.

After moving into the building in 1996 with her former husband—Mathias Guerrand-Hermès, an investment adviser whose great-great-great-grandfather founded the Hermès leather-goods empire—her first effort was to strip the moldings, doors, and fireplace of the stark-white paint that had been slathered on by a previous owner. She decided to live with the sleek, all-white kitchen, which she finds rather jarring amid the historic atmosphere.

Then came the furnishings, including sublime antiques (such as a 19th-century English mahogany

dining table) and heirlooms (oil paintings, bronze sculptures). “This apartment can handle antiques with a pedigree,” Guerrand-Hermès says. “They’re not showpieces but a part of the rooms.”

More recently crafted designs include a pearwood-and-leather campaign table and chairs by Hermès. The plump blue velvet sofas trimmed with brass nailheads, however, have a more hands-on genesis. “I spent the day at a New Jersey upholstery factory and learned how much horsehair and down to use so that the sofas will be very comfortable yet keep their shape forever,” Guerrand-Hermès says with obvious pride. Still, not everything has bench-made provenance. The saucerlike metal chandeliers, she reveals, were found in a souk in Morocco.

Recently, Guerrand-Hermès decided to make some more changes, to give the apartment, she explains, “a fresh look so that this place would feel new again.”





For help, she enlisted a friend, interior decorator Hernán Arriaga, whom she knew could “integrate my lifestyle and personal taste with the building’s originality.” Together she and Arriaga rearranged the furniture, commissioned a little painting—touching up the living area’s walls, whose trompe l’oeil mimics bleached oak—and reconfigured the art.

A dramatic canvas by the French artist Philippe Pasqua has been propped on the mantel. Called *Silence*, it depicts an African tribesman holding a finger to his lips and conveys a sense of utter serenity. “It was the first painting I ever bought,” Guerrand-Hermès says wistfully. “I was probably 22. When I fall in love, I really fall in love. It doesn’t happen often.”

Overall, the place now has a casually polished look without a hint of preciousness, rather like its owner. After all, this is the home of a family where the head of the household pads around in bare feet and a cotton tunic while Lucien and Cléa use the balcony—and sometimes the dining table—to stage theatrical performances. “It’s informal in what could be a formal setting,” Guerrand-Hermès says. “I don’t believe in coasters on the table. Kids, dogs, everyone’s welcome. That’s what this place is for—to be lived in.”

To that end, she recently threw a dinner party to herald the apartment’s refreshed good looks. The meal was served buffet-style on the kitchen island, music filled the air, and just when it seemed that no one wanted to leave, Guerrand-Hermès gently sent her guests packing. It was the end of another long day in an extravagant place, designed for people who are a little different. ■







Paintings turn the stairwell into a gallery; the light fixture was found in Morocco, and the ornate ceiling is original. Facing page, from top: In the master bedroom, Guerrand-Hermès with her children, Lucien and Cléa, and their Jack Russell, Kiko. Custom-made cabinetry with brass fittings, and a Viking range and hood in the kitchen. See Resources.