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SERENITY NOW

DELVING DEEP INTO THE ESSENCE OF THE FAR EAST, A DESIGNER IMPARTS CHIC TRANQUILLITY AND UNPRETENTIOUS CALM TO A PALM BEACH GETAWAY.

WRITTEN BY **JORGE S. ARANGO** / PHOTOGRAPHY BY **PAOLO PETRIGNANI**

It is very easy to evoke a style," says Rome-based architect and designer Achille Salvagni. "It's much more difficult to evoke a mood." Conjuring an atmosphere requires skill and great subtlety, both of which Salvagni possesses in abundance. That's why the owners of this Palm Beach apartment—a yachtsman and his wife, for whom Salvagni had previously designed a private boat—engaged him to appoint the ground-floor pied-à-terre they had purchased, which boasted a garden and views of the ocean.

"The couple wanted everything very calm and clean," explains Salvagni, "a relaxing place with Asian influences but not overly decorated." As usual, Salvagni started with the envelope of the condo. With the help of Anderson-Moore Construction Corp., he collapsed four bedrooms into three, created more classically symmetrical axes throughout, and imparted a more important impression of arrival to the entryways. A spacious octagonal foyer now greets visitors, and a hall directly across from the front door lends the space a sense of processional enfilade that culminates at the main living area. A custom pendant above the center hall table, appropriately called Lens, creates a portal that directs the eye to the terminus of this axis. "I'm obsessed with focal points," says Salvagni.

The Far Eastern vibe begins as soon as one crosses the threshold. But the two Buddha heads atop pedestals in this space are only the most overt manifestation. "Asian style is much more a state of mind than the inclusion of certain objects," says Salvagni, who instead deftly utilized materials to insinuate the pervasive serenity that is characteristic of this aesthetic. "The whole house is done in very velvety, calm surfaces," he says. For example, brushed oak and limestone, "treated with a leather finish to feel like stones smoothed by water," he says, immediately

Silk-lined niches in the foyer hold bronze figures from Achille Salvagni's Aldus collection that he designed in conjunction with Fabio Gnessi; the statues appear like sentries guarding an inner sanctum. Above the brushed-oak flooring from Greece, the ceiling alternates wood slats with strips of Egyptian linen. Salvagni's own bronze-and-onyx Diamond sconces light the transition from hall to main room.

The elliptical entry to the master suite serves as a dressing area encircled by closets. A niche set into the phalanx of doors accommodates a small desk made of parchment and mahogany, designed by Salvagni. Atop it is his Nemo lamp sporting a custom bronze branch finial.

Opposite: A trio of Wings candlesticks on the living room's coffee table is again from the Aldus collection. Beyond these is a 1960s floor lamp that also serves as an occasional table (one of a pair) and a Roman torso from the '40s.

Below: Bespoke seating in the living room includes Salvagni's Vittoria sofa in sky blue velvet by Loro Piana, another sofa dressed in Dedar cotton and a barrel chair inspired by Jean Royère's Polar Bear chair. The clients' own massive coffee table rests on a custom silk carpet by Misha.

resonate as soothing to both sight and touch. Salvagni also mixed the oak with polished mahogany to reference the interiors of a yacht, where his clients spend a lot of time. The palette of materials and furnishings, too, is kept natural and primarily neutral: ivory, white and beige. Touches of pale blue—covering one living room sofa and recurring as piping trim on another and present in a minimalist painting in the dining area—relate to the sky outside.

With the envelope complete, Salvagni turned to the furnishings. He could have "gone the obvious route," he says, kitting the rooms out with Chinese altar tables, chinoiserie patterns and other obvious cultural markers. But, he says, "I mixed in pieces from different eras—the 1920s, '50s and '60s with 18th-century and contemporary pieces. The glue is beauty. You can put an iPhone on a 1950s cabinet over an 18th-century rug, but it still has an Asian sense of serenity."

Instead, the Sino-centric sensibility materializes almost imperceptibly. It shows up in flashes of Chinese red: on the feet of a sofa and the base of the coffee table in the living room, in the red buttons tufting the backs of dining chairs and in the red beads suspended on silk cords tied to the drawer pulls of the master bedroom nightstands. Forms can also hint at Asian exemplars. Those nightstands, for instance, were custom-designed by Salvagni to appear as luxurious stacking boxes—one polished mahogany, the other parchment—that vaguely recall Japanese tansu chests. Or the Eastern suggestion is articulated with equal understatement in the dining room screen, which evokes shoji from a Japanese teahouse yet iterates the concept in wood and brass.

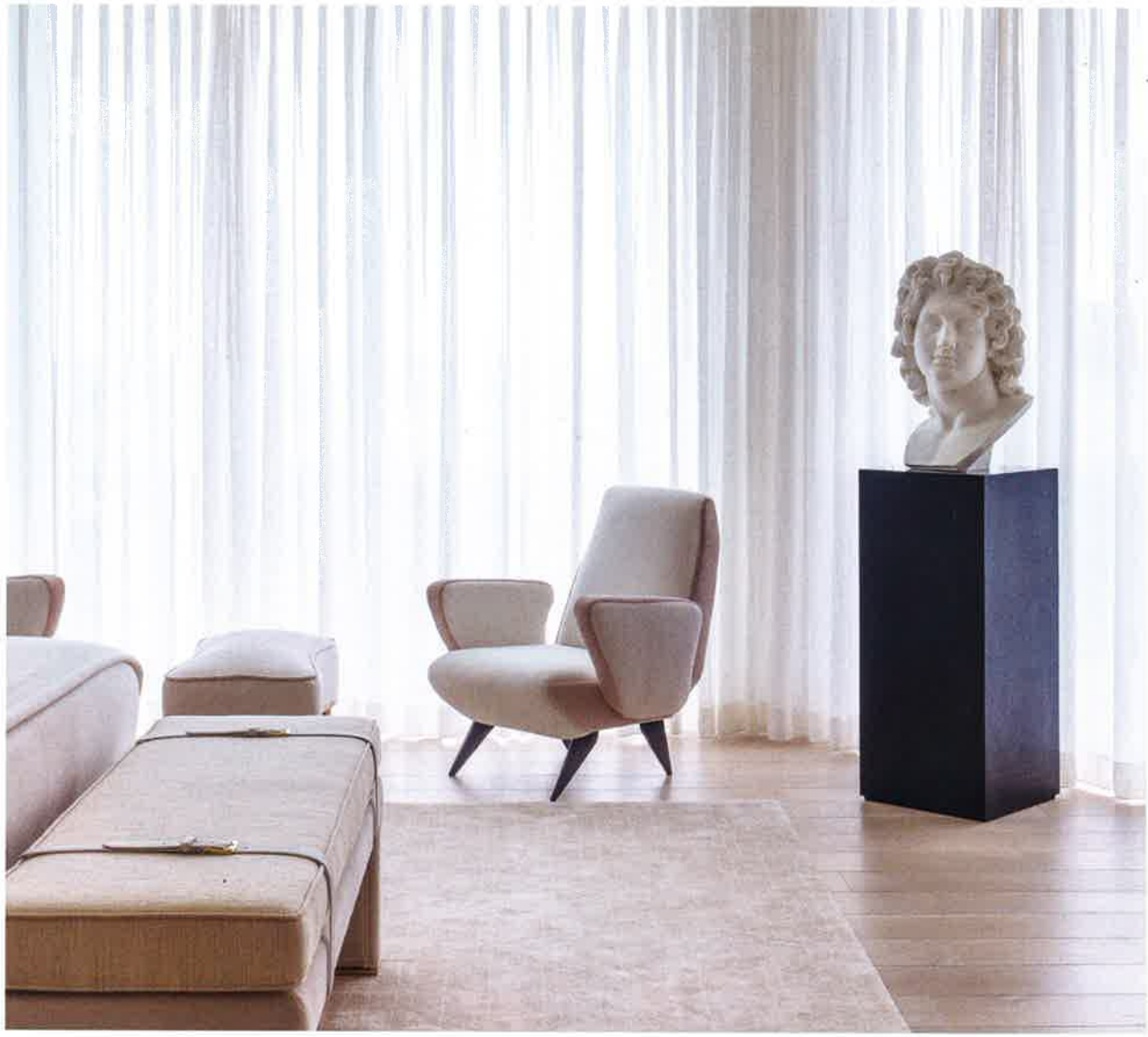
Of course, there are more obvious Asian signifiers, such as another Buddha head in the master bathroom, an 18th-century Chinese Buddha statue in the living room, or a custom hand-painted silk mural behind the master bed resembling a bamboo forest partially shrouded in mist. But these elements are thrown into the design blender with Western classical statuary—Alexander the Great's bust in the master bedroom, a 1940s Roman torso behind one of the living room sofas—and both vintage and contemporary furniture.

A painting by Ettore Spalletti, from Marian Goodman Gallery in London, and Salvagni's iconic Spider chandelier preside over the dining space, where restored chairs from the 1920s to '30s feature unique porcelain buttons designed by Salvagni. Behind is a four-door version of his Gió rosewood sideboard inset with bronze, two '40s lamps and a screen made of Zoffany's Nara wallpaper framed in bleached oak and brass.

"SUBTLETY IS NECESSARY. IF THE DESIGN IS TOO AGGRESSIVE, IT WILL OVERCOME THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT OUTSIDE."

-ACHILLE SALVAGNI

Salvagni conceived of the master bedroom's hand-painted silk mural of a mist-shrouded bamboo forest, as well as the mahogany Art Deco ocean liner-style bed with bronze inlay, the nightstands and the bench. A seating area nearby pairs 1950s Nino Zoncada armchairs with a Barbara Barry ottoman for Henredon.



Most of the contemporary furnishings are customized pieces from Salvagni's own Atelier collection, and they give the spaces a '50s and '60s Italian panache reminiscent of Gio Ponti and Paolo Buffa. They traffic in contrasts between sinuous curves and faceted angles, as well as exquisite craftsmanship and materials. By juxtaposing organic and angular forms, Salvagni balances masculine and feminine elements, thus achieving a sense of polar orientations working in harmonious conjunction.

Finally, even the smallest details are bespoke, imparting a level of downplayed couture that can be sensed more than seen. No one, for example, would know that every hinge on the many cabinet doors are custom-designed. Or that the door pulls in the foyer, which were inspired by the Claude Lalanne center hall table, are each completely unique; the same goes for the Chinese red buttons on the dining chair backs. "Subtlety is necessary," Salvagni says. "If the design is too aggressive, it will overcome the natural environment outside."

We miss these details initially because all of it exists within an environment that, though unquestionably chic, is also basically simple. And what concept is more Asian than simplicity?

A bust of Macedonian ruler Alexander the Great is an intriguing juxtaposition against the armchairs by Zoncada, who frequently collaborated with Gio Ponti and Gustavo Pulitzer on furnishings for Italian ocean liners such as the *SS Raffaello, SS Leonardo da Vinci* and *SS Michelangelo*. Drapery sheers by Dedar filter natural light into the master bedroom scene.