

Island of Design

Long the center of finance, media, art, fashion, and real estate, Manhattan is also one of the top design spots in the world



1

2



3



4



5



6

Story by Tom Eubanks

Photography by Linden Hass

If you were to trace the last four decades of New York City's growth, from its near-bankruptcy and record high-crime rate of the 1970s to its present incarnation as a *Sex and the City*-meets-Disneyland theme park, you'd see first-hand the power of gentrification and the "nesting movement" of the 1990s. Today, the average price of a one-bedroom apartment in Manhattan is \$1.7 million. Which means Manhattan's once legendary "bohemian fringe" has vanished because starving artists can no longer afford to live and work here.

Taking their place, it seems, are buildings. Not the New York skyscrapers of the past, but 20-story "boutique" hotels, *new* museums, and modern-looking yet quaint-seeming corporate headquarters. All made by name-brand architects, or "starchitects," a pejorative appendage that illustrates how far design has come in our consciousness, where architects are the new rock stars.

Just in the past year, Manhattan got its first Frank Gehry building (the IAC/InterActiveCorp headquarters on the West Side Highway; like a billowing sail made of curved, white-frosted glass), its first Renzo Piano tower (the grand, grey New York

Times building a block west of Times Square), its first Santiago Calatrava (a soaring white transportation hub at the World Trade Center site), and yet another free-standing structure to house art: **THE NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART** 1, designed by Japanese "starchitect" SANAA and situated on the Bowery. Yes, that Bowery, which shows how much things change.

In the wake of all this high-wattage real estate, a greater sense of design has followed. And sure enough, the starchitects have turned to mass-marketing pieces that design aficionados and starchitect groupies can't get enough of. You can't just have any old lamp in your \$1.7 million apartment. Obviously, for anyone interested in design, the city has become a breeding ground for exceptional furniture and home décor stores.

In fact, you could spend a month in New York and never find all the best spots. So we gathered our design experts, Dabney Doswell, Sherry Jo Williams, and Tim Ranney, and asked: "Keeping in mind that not everyone can fork over a million dollars for a place to live, if you only had a weekend to hit the best design spots in New York, which would make your list?"

Their answers ranged from obscure outposts in Williams-

burg, Brooklyn to the abundance of sleek **APPLE STORES** 3 to the usual suspects in SoHo, with the shops of MoMa, the Museum of Arts & Design, the Guggenheim, and the **COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM** 2 thrown in for good measure. We've winnowed their selections down to those spots most off the beaten path, distinguishing the high-end spots without diminishing those places where good design can be had on the cheap.

Not surprisingly, **moss** 4, at 150 Greene Street tops each of our experts' lists. Williams considers it a "must-do" for any visitor and considers Murray Moss, who opened the store in 1994, a design guru. According to Doswell the store is "arguably the best furniture and objects shop in the country." At moss, "the distinctions between production and craft, industry and art, and more recently, between industrial and decorative arts" are deliberately blurred. Looking for a set of whale-bone caviar spoons? A Hella Jongerius embroidered ceramic pot? Reproductions of 18th-Century Meissen porcelain dishware? A chair upholstered with stuffed animals? moss is the place for you. Says Doswell, "It's an inspiration and a lesson in design just to walk through the shop."

Looking for a Hella Jongerius embroidered ceramic pot? A chair upholstered with stuffed animals? moss is the place for you.

You'll even see moss' influence when you exit the shop and walk down what Williams calls, "the Greene Street corridor," home to places like Lush Baan, BoConcept, apt, and **CITE** 9 at 131 Greene Street, which carries Cecchini custom furniture, vintage Danish pieces, and Verner Panton lighting. Doswell considers CITE, "heaven sent for design enthusiasts."

While in SoHo, don't forget to pop into **AERO** 8 at 419 Broome Street and check out what Ranney calls, "the masculine warm modernism that owner Thomas O'Brien (the designer of the chic 60 Thompson Hotel) is known for." A short walk around the block to 455 Broadway will bring you to Manhattan's "long overdue" Japanese design store, **MUJI** 12, where



7



8



9



10



11



12

you'll find items like minimal houseware objects, t-shirts shrink-wrapped in cubes, and disposable cardboard speakers. Williams sums up MUJI as "the quintessential source for Japan's version of 'less is more.' It's as friendly to the pocketbook as it is to the eye."

On the other end of the scale—yet just down the street—visit **PEARL RIVER MART** 6, at 477 Broadway. This Chinese home-furnishings emporium is "fantastic for inexpensive folding screens, bamboo chairs, paper lamp shades," says Williams, before adding this caveat: "The store may pose an ethical issue since we don't know the circumstances behind the manufacturing, and what we do know isn't good."

While you're downtown, both Ranney and Doswell suggest heading east (look for the New Museum to guide you) to John Derian Company at 6 East 2nd Street. "On the crafty side of design," says Doswell, "Derian employs artists who help create his charming *découpage* accessories" that depict famous works of art, botanical sketches, maps, and old documents. Besides *découpage*, Derian also carries "odd and lovely antiques, imports, quilts, table linens, and a line of stationery." Says Ranney, "I'm pretty sure the event stylist for the Mad Hatter's tea party created the tabletop with designs from John Derian."

A few blocks west at 39 Bond Street, there's **LOBEL MODERN** 11 with "furnishings that appeal to the James Bond and Tom Ford

in all of us," according to Ranney.

Another secret Ranney and Williams agree upon are the six **HOUSING WORKS THRIFT SHOPS** 10 scattered throughout Manhattan. You'll not only feel good about shopping at them since the profits fight AIDS and homelessness, but you'll also find amazing deals on 'pre-owned' art, furniture, books, and clothing. Says Ranney, "I know more people who have furnished their apartments with HW merchandise than from any other store. The reason is they get amazing donations from the best people (and inventory from design companies)." Ranney recounts that he bought an 80s desk with a sliding top for \$250—it was later appraised at about \$1,000.

Before you head uptown, there are two more spots on our must-do list: **ALAN MOSS** 5—not to be confused with moss—at 436 Lafayette Street, and White Trash at 304 East 5th Street. In the words of Ranney, "Last time I went to Alan Moss, Nina Garcia from *Elle Magazine* and *Project Runway*, was browsing, and a couple of distinguished European Royals were being fawned over while they decided on a very expensive lamp." (Next door to Alan Moss, Ranney suggests two other post-modern shops: DeLorenzo 1950 and Gallery 440.)

On the other end of the spectrum from Alan Moss but just a short walk to the east, you'll find White Trash, a tiny, warm East Village standard that's been a favorite of Ranney's for more

than 20 years. Stuart Zamsky, the proprietor, is a well-known 'picker' who re-sells his treasures at amazing prices. There's always been a fantastic mix of Danish Modern, Knoll, Herman Miller, and brilliant obscure designers accented by random objects that seem to appear as if they were custom-made.

Doswell's next pick takes you uptown to the Museum of Arts & Design at 40 West 53rd Street (down the block from the refurbished MoMa and the stunning Folk Art Museum). The Museum of Arts & Design's shop, says Doswell, "is like a miniature and very colorful global market: vases from France, leather handbags from Italy, sleek tableware from Canada." The trip to the store is almost as educational as a trip to the museum: "each cluster of crafts, housewares, instruments, and ceramics are meticulously organized and accompanied by paper cards listing the artist's name and location."

The next stop is Williams' choice: **THE CONRAN SHOP** 7, nestled under the 59th Street Bridge and featuring modern furniture and household objects from London. Conveniently located near the Design and Decoration (or D&D) Building, The Conran Shop is surrounded by several antique and furnishing stores between 58th and 62nd Streets.

And just twelve blocks north of this uptown 'design district,' you'll find Doswell's final destination: Mariette Himes Gomez at 504 East 74th Street. Gomez, a world-renowned interior

Says Ranney, "I'm pretty sure the event stylist for the Mad Hatter's tea party created the tabletop with designs from John Derian."

designer, "culls statement antique pieces from New York, Paris, and London to create a collection of transitional furniture that is neither too modern, nor overly traditional," says Doswell. "And her choices complete a study in design as they show a pure inclination towards the clean, simple, and elegant."

A good thing to keep in mind on your shopping journey is that many of the independent stores mentioned here will not charge New York state sales tax if you have your purchases sent out of state. So get yourself here and get shopping before the next unpredictable wave hits Manhattan.

EXIT