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GRAND PRIX

GLAMOUR GOES INTO OVERDRIVE AT
AMY FINE COLLINS'S PARK AVENUE APARTMENT WITH
VINTAGE TREASURES FROM
HORST, HELENA RUBINSTEIN, AND CHANEL.

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Facing page: Fashion journalist Amy Fine Collins in her Manhattan apartment; her satin-and-wool dress is by Geoffrey Beene, and her jewelry is by Mish New York. This page: The paneled decorative painting on the living room walls was designed by Robert Couturier and executed by Robert Hoven; the Roman shade is of Manuel Canovas's Dari silk from Cowtan & Tout. See Resources.

The Lucite chair is from a bedroom suite designed for Helena Rubinstein's Park Avenue apartment; the 1970s wool rug is by Emilio Pucci. Facing page, from bottom: Collins with her daughter, Flora. A Christian Bérard illustration and paintings by Collins's mother, Elsa Honig, and Dorothy Gillespie are arranged around an Empire mahogany console; the bark-cloth screen is from Horst, and the circa-1920s rug is attributed to Paul Poiret. See Resources.





MOST OF US WOULD consider ourselves lucky to make the occasional style statement. But for an extraordinary few, the subject can never be dealt with that succinctly. For them, style is a sonnet, a symphony, an epic. Among these rarefied individuals is Amy Fine Collins, a writer who not only chronicles the high points of the high life of the past century but also somehow manages to hit them herself.

Collins, who has produced fashion and style guides and written a volume on American Impressionists, was trained as an art historian. But her new book, *The God of Driving*, is something of a departure. It's the story of a woman obsessed with the glamour of the past who confronts her 21st-century phobias and gets into the driver's seat. With the help of an unlikely adviser, she learns to propel herself forward.

The transformation of Collins's Park Avenue apartment was more in character, but it's a story not with-



A sketch of Balenciaga couture, a 1940s cover illustration for *Vogue*, and an oil on canvas by Marcel Vertès are displayed in the dining room; the whitewashed chairs are by Syrie Maugham, and the Palm chairs by Mario Villa are upholstered in Gene Meyer scarves. Facing page, from top: A 1930s églomisé cabinet that belonged to Helena Rubinstein and a Venetian wall sconce, one of a pair, once owned by Gloria Vanderbilt. A vintage palm-branch console, mirror, and tocchères by Serge Roche in the entry; the decorative painting is by Robert Hoven, and the rug is by Gene Meyer. See Resources.



out its own determination, serendipity, and wise counsel. "It's a collection of friends more than it is a collection," she says of the conglomeration that fills the expansive space. Fortunately, her friends are as stylish as she is. Decorator Robert Couturier helped refine the layout, selected the fabrics and curtains, and made the living room banquettes and the library bookshelves. Fashion designer Gene Meyer, whose scarves now serve as upholstery on pillows and chairs throughout the apartment, created the exuberant rug in the entry. And decorative painter Robert Hoven—who at first insisted he wouldn't do anything that didn't involve a brush—ended up advising on, and helping execute, nearly everything anyway.

"I've never had a plan," Collins says, standing tall with her precise posture, surveying the scene. "To me, it's always been about the object." But these are no ordinary objects. The rooms abound with





evidence of her fascination with cosmetics queen Helena Rubinstein and designer Elsa Schiaparelli, who helped shape the prewar decades, when fashion was about elegance rather than ease and beauty was a realm of fantasy, not science. Several major pieces once belonged to Rubinstein, including the Venetian mirror in the living room, a 1930s églomisé console, and a pair of Lucite chairs that once accompanied the beauty diva's iconic bed of the same material. "I hunted them down," Collins says, adding ominously, "and I think I know where the bed is too." Original gouaches by artist Marcel Vertès for two Schiaparelli fragrance ads hang in the dining room, and a vintage "Schiap" silk pajama bag has pride of place in her bedroom. Even the "sweet citric colors" that Collins chose for the walls—face-powder pinks, lipstick reds, and eye-shadow blues and greens—evoke what she calls "the Dior '50s."





In the office/dressing room, a Louis XV-style desk that once belonged to Hugh Hefner, an Empire-style armchair, and an Austrian Biedermeier chair; the dress is by Carolina Herrera. Facing page, from top: The library's abalone-shell chandelier was designed by Tony Duquette for Doris Duke's Beverly Hills estate; the sofa by Robert Couturier and the Directoire chairs are all covered in Igor fabric by Quadrille. Artwork by Couturier, Gene Meyer, Karl Lagerfeld, Victor Skrebneski, and others. See Resources.

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But then every piece—whether its provenance is the estate of film director Billy Wilder or the New York City Opera thrift shop—has an association and a story. And Collins, with her historian's instincts and the journalistic flair she's honed as a special correspondent for *Vanity Fair*, is more than happy to share them. She discovered the living room's Empire tables in Paris when she and her husband, Brad, were on their honeymoon (not surprisingly, their daughter, Flora, is already a fledgling style maven at 11). The chandelier in the library is by Tony Duquette, done for Doris Duke's Beverly Hills estate. A Vertès gouache in the entrance hall was a gift to Duquette from Elsie de Wolfe. Horst, the legendary fashion photographer and a good friend, bought the cabinet in the bedroom directly from Jean-Michel Frank. The Chinese Deco rug in the library belonged to Collins's grandmother, whom she characterizes as "a bit Auntie Mame." A pair of screens were made by Horst from Indonesian bark cloth given to him by Coco Chanel, to thank him for his famous portrait of her. A painting of a bull's skull at first glance looks like a Picasso but was actually painted by Collins's mother, Elsa Horig, who's also an art historian. And high on a ledge in the library is a collection of her father's pipes. "I love the smell of them," she sighs.

It's an extraordinary mix, and one that works only because of her brash confidence. "I think everything goes together," says Collins. "For me, there are no ugly colors." She points out that the stripes and polka dots that appear in the upholstery and Roman shades, on a bedspread, and painted on the dining room walls are a tribute to Geoffrey Beene, another friend, whose sleek clothing has become something of her signature. And they give a structured backdrop to her home's maximalism and Baroque bounty. "Because, let's face it, I'm drawn to a crazy amalgam of styles and forms," she adds, smiling. "As Francis Bacon wrote, 'There is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion.'" Or, as Collins herself understood long before she ever got behind the wheel of a car, being stuck in neutral gets you nowhere fast. ■





Collins's velvet-upholstered headboard is from I Pezzi Dipinti, and the painted screen is by Marcel Vertès; a Geoffrey Beene silk dress is draped across the bed. Horst purchased the Jean-Michel Frank caned cabinet from the designer in the 1930s. See Resources.