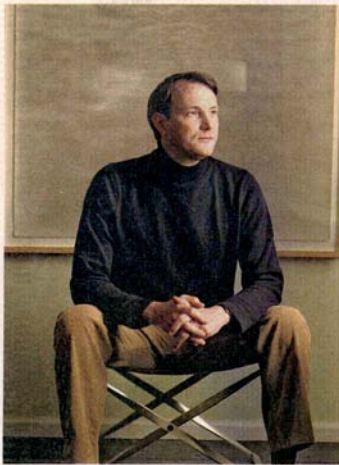


Architect's Magnificent Obsession

By PENELOPE GREEN



Heidi Schumann for The New York Times

YOUNG AND PROLIFIC

Stephan Jaklitsch, the architect for Marc Jacobs stores, in his apartment, where the focus is on precision and detail.

THE apartment had all the flourishes you would expect from a young and prolific architect: the vintage modernist furniture (a little Mies, some Florence Knoll, a chair by Bruno Mathsson); the muted palette of gray, black and brown; the gallery-quality black-and-white photographs (mostly Wayne Maser and the haunting botanical portraits of Don Freeman). It's all very precise, and it's all in the details.

But the architect, Stephan Jaklitsch, 37, whose extreme good taste has shaped all the Marc Jacobs stores worldwide (that's nearly 50, and still counting) and who has been running his own 17-person firm for six and a half years, has amped the aesthetic volume up so high in his Horatio Street one-bedroom that only the most educated ears can pick up the frequency. For instance, on the coffee table, sitting casually at magazine level (not that there were any unsightly magazines) was a tiny celadon bowl the color of a grasshopper's wing. It turned out to be about a century or two older than most objects in the room.

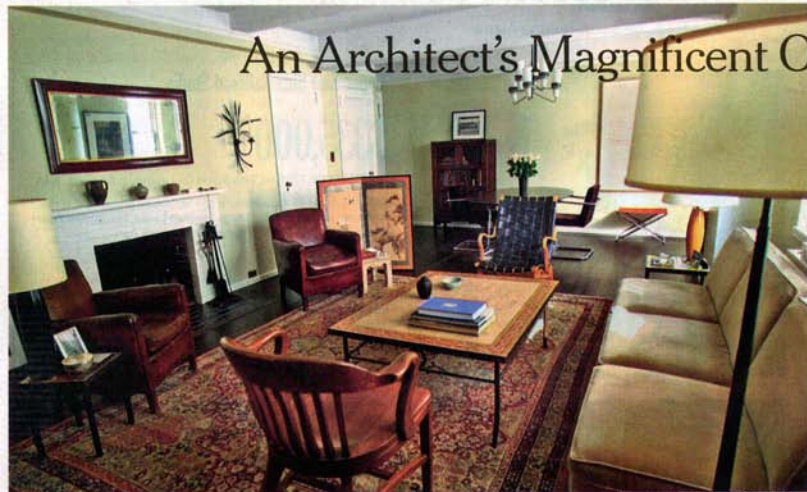
Mr. Jaklitsch took about 15 seconds to find the bowl's pedigree papers — it's Chinese, from the Qianlong Dynasty (1736-95) — which were filed neatly in a Florence Knoll credenza nearby. Nearly as quickly, he offered a delicate Chinese terra cotta vessel weighing no more than a sheet of paper, its clay skin imprinted by a faint basket-weave pattern. Its papers declared that its year of birth was somewhere between 475 B.C. and 221 B.C.

Slightly built and with a husky voice and impish smile, Mr. Jaklitsch looked considerably younger than his age. An hour or so later, shrugging on his Marc Jacobs peacoat, he in fact looked much like a graduating senior from a prep school in the Northeast

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HABITATS/Horatio Street

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Photographs by Heidi Schumann for The New York Times

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— Andover, maybe, or St. Paul's. Except that his peacock was lined in sable, and his dorm room gawgaws have been bought on the Hollywood Road in Hong Kong.

"I've had friends walk in and say: 'What is the story in this room? How does the Asian stuff work with the modern? I don't get it.'" Mr. Jaklitsch said. "The story is just that I respond to anything that is rigorously designed."

Which explains why this lover of Mies is living in an archetypal prewar apartment building — one of five Emery Roth buildings designed for the real estate developers Bing & Bing in Greenwich Village just before the Depression (and the only one that's a co-op); the other four, at 59, 289 and 302 West 12th Street and 45 Christopher Street, are condos. It's sort of a joke, Mr. Jaklitsch said, but kind of true that when he learned that Mies van der Rohe had, in fact, lived in a prewar building himself, Mr. Jaklitsch thought he "could cope with this one."

Also, as he pointed out, it's rigorously designed; its gracious proportions are an Emery Roth signature. R.A. Sassone, a vice president at the Corcoran Group who han-

dles sales in many of the five Bing & Bing buildings, said it's a truism among fans of the Village quintet that if you are blindfolded and led into one, "you can't tell which building you're in." All have the same low and lovely beamed ceilings, brick fireplaces and cloistered bedrooms. Mr. Jaklitsch said he loved the proportions of his 800-square-foot home, bought in early 2002 for \$441,000. (At an open house for the apartment, which had been on the market for just four days, Mr. Jaklitsch was one of 90 people sidling through its rooms. He found the owner, shook his hand and said, "Here's the asking price and here's my phone number.")

For a guy who spends four days each week traveling, it was imperative he find a quiet sanctuary for the few hours he has to himself. (Last year, Marc Jacobs stores opened in Boston, Beijing, Shanghai and Los Angeles; including the Marc Jacobs stores on deck for this year and beyond, Mr. Jaklitsch's firm right now has 45 projects on its drafting tables.)

"The pace of work is relentless," he said happily.

Mr. Jaklitsch resurfaced the apartment's walls and replaced moldings long since vanished to restore it to a crisp 1929 state. He didn't touch its closet-sized kitchen and funky tiled bathroom. Set at the back of the

building, the apartment is as quiet as a house on a suburban cul-de-sac. Mr. Jaklitsch has no television set, and the cellphone reception is lousy. "And since I'm never here to return calls on the land line," he said, "people have learned not to use that number."

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town house a few blocks away is a 19th-century paneled homage to itself. Five years ago, a contractor recommended Mr. Jaklitsch to Robert Duffy, Marc Jacobs's business partner, when Mr. Duffy wanted to renovate his own Fifth Avenue apartment.

Mr. Jaklitsch has since completed a town house for Mr. Duffy and designed every



IT'S ALL IN THE DETAILS
The living room, far left, the bedroom, below, and a decoration in Stephen Jaklitsch's apartment on Horatio Street in Greenwich Village, where the design, in a muted palette, includes modernist furniture, gallery-quality black-and-white photographs and carefully chosen objects d'art.

Mr. Jaklitsch, who grew up in Maryland and took his architecture degree at Princeton, has lived in the same four-block section of the West Village.

"I hate the grid," he said, "and I love the trees."

Like many architects, Mr. Jaklitsch calls himself a generalist and does not stamp his clients' spaces in his own image. A West Village town house is all steel and hearty rough-hewn beams; another town house a few blocks away is a 19th-century paneled homage to itself. Five years ago, a contractor recommended Mr. Jaklitsch to Robert Duffy, Marc Jacobs's business partner, when Mr. Duffy wanted to renovate his own Fifth Avenue apartment.

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Marc Jacobs store, in collaboration with the French furniture designer Christian Liaigre, beginning with the company's second, in San Francisco, in August 2000. "He is demanding as hell," Mr. Jaklitsch said of Mr. Duffy. It was clearly a compliment.

Mr. Duffy later doffed his own hat to Mr. Jaklitsch. "He has incredibly good taste — and he would hate for me to say that," Mr. Duffy said. "I love watching him on these safaris through the antiques stores in Hong Kong, evaluating and choosing and falling in love with a perfect bowl. I like that his apartment is so orderly and so neat, and that maybe there is this one perfect object on display that I know — because I've seen him do it — he's agonized over. And in our work together, I need the integrity of what he does to make what I want be good."

Mr. Jaklitsch is indeed so in love with good design he's arrayed silver-framed photographs of great buildings on a mantel and a side table like family portraits. You'll peer into them expecting to see the grinning faces of small children (Mr. Jaklitsch has 24 nieces and nephews). Instead, you'll see a snapshot of the Japanese Imperial Palace, or the Parthenon, his favorite building.

His second favorite is the Resurrection Chapel in Stockholm — a riot of classical details. He'll eagerly point out its intricacies, and the fact that its architect, Sigurd Lewentz, designed it with two proportional systems, one for the inside and one for the exterior.

"No one could know that just by looking," he said, leading Lewentz's obsessiveness. "But he knew, and it mattered to him. I love that."

So, a visitor wondered, taking in the pristine space around: did Mr. Jaklitsch consider himself to be in any way obsessive?

"Completely," he said. "Have you ever met an architect who wasn't?"

