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Recreate a Glamorous 1970s Parisian Living Room

Designer Miles Redd singles out this party-ready 1970s salon—French designer Henri Samuel's own—as a study in easygoing glamour. Here's why it works and how to get the look



The circa 1976 Paris living room of designer Henri Samuel. PHOTO: PASCAL HINOUS/RIZZOLI

By Kathryn O'Shea-Evans

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THE FATES HAD a reason for awarding New York interior designer Miles Redd a surname synonymous with crimson and candied apples: He's a color pro. "People are always like, 'You're so daring!' Not really, but I do love rich color," he said. "I don't think I'd ever want to live in a hot-hot-pink room, yet I understand that a carnation pink one can be uplifting."

His interiors often channel the stylized, Technicolor drama of film sets. In a family home in San Francisco, for example, Mr. Redd lined living room walls in seawater satin and upholstered footstools in jaguar-spotted silk velour that pops against the sedate antique Persian rug. "I like the push-pull of mixing good things from various decades," he said.

So it's no shock that an eclectic maximalism reigns in one of Mr. Redd's favorite spaces, the circa-1976 living room of French designer Henri Samuel (1904-1996), which Mr. Redd discovered years ago in a book. Samuel transformed his rented Paris townhouse into a warm and welcoming refuge where the futuristic furniture he'd commissioned played against terra-cotta raw silk walls and traditional gilt boiserie.

Samuel designed homes for Rothschilds and Vanderbilts, but stateside, his reputation is as dusty as a box of attic treasures—only design cognoscenti take the time to pull back the lid. That may change in April, when Rizzoli releases the monograph, “Henri Samuel: Master of the French Interior,” by design historian and gallerist Emily Evans Eerdmans. “Many people I interviewed told me Samuel knew the art of living, and his interiors embodied that,” Ms. Eerdmans said.

Raised in a wealthy banking family that lost much of its fortune in 1934’s Stavisky Affair, a far-reaching embezzling scheme, Samuel sustained himself and a few relatives as a designer, becoming so expert at re-creating historic French décor that he consulted on the Palace of Versailles’s 1957 renovation of the Empire rooms.

In his own spaces, Samuel pushed the gilt-edged envelope—combining modernist pieces (Plexiglass-and-brass Philippe Hiquily armchairs) with classical ones (an antique lyre occasional chair) to create vibrant glamour that’s still cozy. And yes, the look can be imitated in architecturally bland quarters. “I don’t know if you’ll ever get the incredible sense of grandeur of the room, but you can get the mood,” Mr. Redd said.

Undercut the Bullion



Labarge Mirror, \$1,495, 1stdibs.com

Like Mr. Redd, Samuel wisely married the highly wrought and the organic, balancing gold-leafed boiserie (a French term for carved wood paneling) with tortoiseshell objets and side tables topped with petrified wood. Plants add earthiness, too. This gilt-wood trumeau mirror can stand in; just be sure to place something unpretentious nearby. “Samuel got that if everything in the room was gold, you kind of look like a French whore; you need earthy things to ground the glitter,” Mr. Redd said. Parcel-Gilt Labarge Mirror, \$1,495, 1stdibs.com

Elevate Your Taste

It's a moment of theater: Pedestals in the room direct the eye, much like stage lights, to whatever rests atop them. Inspired by an Italian antique in his own home, Mr. Redd designed this version of engineered hardwood and veneers for his new collection for Ballard Designs. Miles Redd Scagliola Pedestal, \$399, ballarddesigns.com



Miles Redd Scagliola Pedestal, \$399, ballarddesigns.com

Bust Out a Myth

Samuel's Atlas sculpture is actually an Empire period bronze clock, Ms. Eerdmans said. Though many sculptures of Atlas depict the Greek god kneeling under the weight of the world, Samuel's stands on his feet. This bronze and brass work strikes a similar note, and gives any room a lettered, Greek-mythology look. Bronze Sculpture Atlas, \$3990, 1stdibs.com



Bronze Sculpture Atlas \$3,741.11, 1stdibs.com



Delano Sofa in Velvet, \$3,195, modshop1.com

Think Inky

“Velvet is very rich,” Mr. Redd said of the room’s sofa—and black velvet dramatically so. Samuel chose the same fabric for his curtains. This sofa features a more streamlined silhouette, biscuit tufting (skip the loose pillows) and a brass toekick. Delano Sofa in Velvet, \$3,195, modshop1.com



Tyler Leather Console Table with Stitch Detail, \$999, cb2.com

Underpin a Painting

According to Ms. Eerdmans, Samuel commissioned the bronze console by Marseille-born sculptor César Baldaccini to sit under the Balthus painting, one of the most significant things Samuel owned. This leather-wrapped table with brass feet can similarly underscore a canvas, but you can toss keys on it without fear of marring a piece of art. Tyler Leather Console Table with Stitch Detail, \$999, cb2.com



Antique French Slipper Chair, \$950, chairish.com

Sit Very Pretty

The lyre-back chair to the left of the door, though not as macho as the Atlas statue, introduces another neoclassical note. “The chair is all curves and delicate legs, a feminine counterpart to butch bronze and metal pieces,” Mr. Redd said. Those kinds of contrasts are key to the room’s success. The resale website Chairish currently offers this early 19th-century French slipper variety. \$950, chairish.com



Hans Barbell Side Table, \$1,450, jonathanadler.com

Make the Feast Movable

Samuel kept numerous side tables around his living room, including those topped with slabs of petrified wood he commissioned from Philippe Hiquily. Drink stands you can move hither and thither easily help hosts prepare a room for a party; Jonathan Adler’s polished brass model approaches Samuel’s in the sheen department. Hans Barbell Side Table \$1,450, jonathanadler.com

Craft a Backdrop

“Paint and sheet rock are one thing, batting and silk are another—quieter, softer, more luxe,” Mr. Redd said. Emulate the room’s upholstered walls with textured, painted wallpaper in a pumpkin hue from Farrow & Ball. “Samuel didn’t love that orangy red color in particular, he just knew everything would look good against it,” Ms. Eerdmans explained. “It was about creating an ambience.” Drag DR Wallpaper 1235, \$195 per roll, farrow-ball.com



Drag DR Wallpaper 1235, \$195 per roll, farrow-ball.com PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/ THE WALL STREET JOURNAL