

Inside Author and Antiques Dealer Emily Eerdmans's Wildly Immersive Gallery-In-Residence

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Emily Eerdmans bypassed the urban exodus and rooted herself deeper in the heart of New York City's West Village.



MICHAEL DIAZ-GRIFFITH AUG 19, 2021



Emily Eerdmans's gallery was once a cult secret among New York's design cognoscenti. Tucked beneath a landmarked 1838 townhouse in Greenwich Village, the art gallery-slash-interiors emporium was unmarked and ivy-hidden. That all changed this year. Up went a bold metal plaque ("EERDMANS"), and in waltzed a parade of chintz-masked patrons: Eerdmans had rented half the building, and now anyone jonesing for demilune consoles, whimsical oil sketches, or throw pillows painted to look like pugs can trip effortlessly into her taffeta-curtained world.

The East 10th Street entrance also now leads, unusually, to Eerdmans's living quarters. In the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the city's upper crust decanted to Westchester, Palm Beach, and seemingly anywhere but Manhattan, Eerdmans and her husband, Andrew McKeon, moved from Brooklyn Heights to a suite of rooms carved out of the expanding storefront, right in the thick of things. "Have I gone mad?" she texted me with her characteristic brand of chatty candor, pondering the idea of living and working under one (historic) roof. "Be harsh." I wanted to be. But for my friend, a design historian who literally wrote the book on style icons Madeleine Castaing and Henri Samuel (both of whom worked from home before #WFH), the leap felt like fate. It was less about living above the proverbial shop and more about transforming a charged-with-potential environment—and her life—into a total work of art.

Tour This West Village Gallery-In-Residence



EMILY EERDMANS Owner [Emily Eerdmans](#). Silverplate watering can, Hadley Antiques KELLY MARSHALL



LOWER SALON The lower salon serves as a vivid shop gallery for an ever-changing inventory of antiques and art. Pink wall paint, Nancy's Blushes by [Farrow & Ball](#) KELLY MARSHALL



GARDEN Off the Eerdmans' ground-floor bedroom, a private garden ensconced in oak leaf hydrangea, salvia, and Lollipop verbena. Basket weave porcelain vase, [Tiffany & Co.](#) KELLY MARSHALL



UPPER SALON The upper salon is light-flooded and lime-lacquered—a shot of pure caffeine. Custom lime-green walls, [Fine Paints of Europe](#) KELLY MARSHALL



UPPER SALON A 20th-century chinoiserie mirror and contemporary oil painting by [Margaret Kennedy](#) shine atop lime-green walls (custom, [Fine Paints of Europe](#)). KELLY MARSHALL



UPPER GARDEN In the upper garden, a faux-bois [Currey & Company](#) bench is paired with slatted metal bistro chairs ([Fermob](#)). KELLY MARSHALL



LIVING ROOM The aubergine living room is part of the family's private quarters. Glazed wall finish, Vincent Naletilic. Flower-basket oil painting, Jean de Botton KELLY MARSHALL



LIVING ROOM A 19th-century French sunburst clock is suspended by a shantung silk bow from Mario Buatta's living room. Ottoman velvet, George Spencer through [Claremont](#) KELLY MARSHALL



BEDROOM A custom headboard and bed skirt crafted of Brunshwig & Fils's Verrieres floral. Bed linens and duvet cover, D. Porthault KELLY MARSHALL

The result is a lesson for anyone faced with decorating an unusual space (or what feels like an endless series of them).

Take the entrance, for example. A lofty but window-free stair hall where three types of flooring converge, the space risked being airless and chaotic. Eerdmans considered brightening it with light hues or a cheerful all-over pattern. “Most of my decorating choices were about hiding a multitude of sins, but this space was always going to be dark,” she says with the fatalism of a hardened renter. “So I thought, Why not go with it and just have fun?”

Exploiting the room’s height, she commissioned Christian Bérard–inspired murals in emerald and lime green, gold, and deepest aubergine, running them all the way up to the ceiling. The stylized faux boiserie delivers the gravitas of instant architecture and an injection of whimsy. Wall-to-wall leopard print carpet (a nod to Castaing) hides the disparate surfaces below. As you ascend the stairs, daylight is the last thing on your mind.



Pink wall paint, Nancy's Blushes by Farrow & Ball
KELLY MARSHALL

That makes a delicious surprise of the next room, which is light-flooded and lime-lacquered—a shot of pure caffeine. Because the space is devoted to the display of art, and not the art of living, it is defined by the candy shell of glossy color on its walls and the softscape around its edges: tasseled Austrian shades à la Samuel, a portiere hiding the kitchen, and monumental Christmas palms. Exhibitions rotate on the walls and center table.

Toward the front parlor, a private realm emerges. You are still in Eerdman's design laboratory, and visitors may well be beckoned in to lounge with a tray of Champagne and William Poll potato chips, but nothing is for sale here. "I think of the original Colefax and Fowler," says Eerdman, "where Nancy Lancaster's bedsit is the crown jewel of the shop." Because the room was truncated to create a bathroom (which is classic Studio 54, by the way, papered in a decadent Brunschwig & Fils pattern), Eerdman has drowned it in aubergine lacquer, erasing the corners. Wall-to-wall carpet covers an unrestored parquet floor, channeling 1990s London. You almost expect to spy an off-white rotary phone in the corner, or one of Princess Diana's endlessly reposted streetwear looks thrown across the clover-leaf pouf. Are we in the past or present? New York or London? Somehow, the ambiguity is deeply comforting, like stepping into a world populated by all of your favorite things at once, space and time be damned.



The upper salon serves as a vivid shop gallery for an ever-changing inventory of antiques and art. Tassel shade trim, Samuel & Sons

KELLY MARSHALL

Of all the rooms, this one most evokes Eerdman's interior design mentor, Mario Buatta, the "Prince of Chintz," who famously interpreted the English country-house look for American sensibilities (optimistic), light (bright), and budgets (big). Eerdman wrote the book on him too, and the two grew close through the process. She was with him when he died, and in the year that followed, she became the steward of his estate—and legacy. The result? "Buattacon," as one friend termed the burst of retrospective attention that generated a reappraisal of the man and a tsunami of fresh interest in his work.



A 19th-century French sunburst clock is suspended by a shantung silk bow from Mario Buatta's living room. Ottoman velvet, George Spencer through Claremont

KELLY MARSHALL

For some in the design world, that moment marked a long-awaited return to “pretty” decoration, but for newcomers to traditional style—many of them below the age of 40, primed by a revival of 1990s fashion, and ready to cast a whimsical eye on the recent past—the appeal of Buatta’s look lies in its charming discordance with the digital age. Today, Buatta-inspired bows proliferate on Instagram, and Eerdmans has pinned a set above the pictures in the front parlor. Beyond this homage, however, she refrains from channeling her mentor in a doggedly literal way. In an era of two-dimensional decoration, rife with copy-paste imitations of particular designers or design tropes, Eerdmans decorates in three dimensions, solving problems and creating atmospheres with a highly sophisticated set of tools. Beautiful photos are a byproduct, not the point.

Her husband Andrew agrees: “There’s never been a more lovely sitting room for sitting,” he says proudly. “It makes me happy to spend time here in the evening.” Adds Eerdmans, “I do feel connected to Mario’s message that a room should be a joyful experience above all.”



Off the Eerdmans' ground-floor bedroom, a private garden ensconced in oak leaf hydrangea, salvia, and Lollipop verbena. Basket weave porcelain vase, Tiffany & Co.

KELLY MARSHALL

As we chat in the garden (an enviably capacious slice of the Cotswolds inserted into the vertiginous “rear window” interior of an urban block), I realize that Eerdmans’s project, a total work of art, may be unfinished for a long time to come. The garden has just been planted. Eerdmans is just getting started. She is passionate about supporting the artists and craftspeople she represents, and this is a showcase for their talents. Exhibitions will come and go. Visitors will ebb and flow. “I’m sure I’ll want to change everything tomorrow,” she says. “But we’ll take it one exhibition at a time.” She pauses. “We’ll be home!” And the front door will be wide open.

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