



Charity and Inspiration at Annual Show House

A walk with my decorator through an extraordinary beaux-arts mansion

By Julia Finley Willis

"Let's go to the Kips Bay Decorator Show House," my decorator implores, since he is desperately trying to get me to do something—anything—to improve my living quarters, or hovel, as he calls it. "We'll be inspired."

For 35 years, the Kips Bay Show House has featured top interior designers in extraordinary settings, all to benefit a great charity, the Kips Bay Boys and Girls Club in the Southeast Bronx. Founded in 1915, the mission of the organization is to provide after school programs for more than 13,000 disadvantaged children from ages 6 to 18. Jennifer Lopez herself was once a member, as was current Executive Director Daniel Quintero. Quintero has been instrumental in bringing the Boys and Girls Club to youngsters living in homeless shelters.

This year, international real estate developer Janna Bullock, CEO of RIGroup, has graciously lent a classic 1904 Beaux Arts mansion at 14 East 82nd Street. Six floors and 12,000 square feet offer up a lot of furniture for fundraising, and my decorator and I wander through it all.

Silver seems to be the operative color, from the Arne Jacobsen leather chairs in the entrance hall to the tinsel wainscoting applied by Beale-Lana along the staircase. There's even a silver ceiling in the "Bathroom" by Scott Salvator. Silver, that is,

mixed with lemon and raspberry—popsicle colors, I think. Much of this looks to me like Miami South Beach in the 1950s, but my decorator (who has a quicker eye than I) says it's really West Los Angeles in the 1960s. Have we spotted a trend, or stumbled into a time warp? Though it's all fabulous, could any of it work in my tiny apartment?

Maybe because my decorator and I are on an environmental kick at the moment (so is Mayor Bloomberg, and we don't want to be left out), we linger in a more verdant room: specifically David Barrett's "Cocktails in a Town House Potting Shed." This leafy terrace off the first floor kitchen is meant to be an informal spot for entertaining, with floral creations by Murphy and Co. and fern prints from J. Pocker. I could see myself sitting peacefully here, sipping tea and meditating.

On the third floor, an oil painting by McDermott and McGough in Jed Johnson Associates' "Bedroom" seems to mock me. It's titled "Forbidden Secrets of Sex" and sex does seem to be forbidden at the moment in my bedroom. "Have hope," says my decorator. "Maybe if you didn't have quite so many books," he adds. "And stop pretending those mice are pets."

Moving on, we reach the fourth floor and Stephen Miller Siegel's small "Sitting Room," soothing in neutral tones of brown and beige, with antique Japanese screens



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from Liza Hyde, raw silk walls using Ralph Lauren fabric, and pillows made from old kimonos. I already know I was Japanese in a previous life. I could nest here. My decorator approves—a good use of color, he thinks.

When we reach the Kips Bay Shop, I am thrilled. I can actually afford some of these gently used home furnishings, generously donated to the event. There's a Venetian painting for \$1,200, but my decorator won't let me buy it—too big, he says. I am seeing a lot I like—lamps, pillows, chairs—but he says no, won't work. Eventually he does relent: I can consider two very pretty sailboat paintings reasonably priced at \$300 each.

We finally get to the sixth floor, and I am ready for a long chat. Luckily, Daniel Richards, landscape designer for Plant Specialists, is around to tell us about the terrace garden he has installed. Since the Metropolitan Museum can be seen on one side and a "roofscape" on the other, Richards built up a hedge facing the street to give a feeling of enclosure. He tells us he must first consider "aspect," meaning the view, the sun, and the climate, then the water supply (is it feasible?) for his foliage. This roof terrace is 90 percent evergreen; it

will last year-round. Plant Specialists can also provide monthly or seasonal "tweaking."

While the terrace is not quite a "green roof," it's a pleasure to see. Green roof is a term I've just learned—Janna Bullock is an advocate—which means covering a city roof with plants and soil. More popular in Europe than in the U.S. at present, a green roof reduces carbon dioxide impact and cuts heating costs in winter and cooling costs in summer. Why doesn't everybody have a green roof?

We've seen a lot, my mind is whirling. I seem to be a woodland creature, happy to burrow under the softer forest tones of bark and twig, chlorophyll and moss. Not so happy with the harder surfaces of metal, leather or lacquer. What to do?

"We'll start with some philodendron," my decorator says. Then he sighs.

The Kips Bay Decorator Show House 2007 will run through May 22. Admission is \$30. For more information, call 212-288-3555 or go to www.kipsbay.org.

Around \$600 will sponsor a child for one year's membership in Kips Bay Boys and Girls Club. For donations, contact Daniel Quintero at 718-893-8600 x240. ■



Daniel Richards, landscape designer for Plant Specialists, installed a terrace garden at the Show House.