

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL DESIGN AUTHORITY

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## Power Players

AT HOME WITH  
**NEIL PATRICK HARRIS  
+ DAVID BURTKA**

THALIA +  
TOMMY MOTTOLA  
MICHAEL BAY  
WILL KOPELMAN  
BRIAN GRAZER  
LAPO ELKANN  
KARA ROSS



PLUS:  
THE  
ESSENTIAL  
GUIDE  
TO BALI

# JET BLUE

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WITH TURQUOISE WALLS AND SAPPHIRE-STRIPED FLOORS, THE PROVOCATIVE MILAN PENTHOUSE OF FIAT HEIR AND GLOBE-TROTTERING ENTREPRENEUR LAPO ELKANN SHOWCASES HIS SINGULAR STYLE AND PAYS TRIBUTE TO HIS FAVORITE HUE



Entrepreneur and designer Lapo Elkann in the living room of his Milan apartment, which was renovated and decorated with Studio Natalia Bianchi; the totem is by Ettore Sottsass. For details see Sources.

## “Ninety percent of my social life is due to work,” says designer Lapo Elkann,

whose cropped haircut and natty attire seem to pepper websites and magazines—as well as his whirlwind Instagram feed—24/7. “I like seeing exhibitions, artists, galleries, and designers, but I couldn’t give a damn about being social.” It’s not as if the scion of Italy’s storied Agnelli clan has much free time. In addition to creating sporty apparel and eyewear for his Italia Independent brand, Elkann distributes movies with his filmmaker sister, Ginevra, and consults on Ferrari Tailor Made, a custom division of Fiat Chrysler (the automotive giant’s roots can be traced to his great-great-grandfather Giovanni Agnelli, who cofounded Fiat in 1899). Elkann also recently launched a made-to-measure capsule collection with Gucci. “I like to play, but I work my ass off,” he says, addressing his Brussels-today-Miami-tomorrow schedule. “When you build new companies, you need to be on the front line.”

But Elkann does slow down occasionally. Hence his most personal project to date: his duplex penthouse overlooking a centuries-old square in Milan. When he acquired the 3,100-square-foot space, which is in a severe postwar palazzo, a bit over a year ago, a primary objective was to banish the apartment’s darkness. “It had to be packed with light,” Elkann says over a breakfast of persimmons, brioches, and coffee on his terrace, where an Italia Independent flag flutters when he is at home, snapping amid potted kumquat and lemon trees.

Working with Milanese architect Natalia Bianchi, a friend, the sun-loving Elkann added floor-to-ceiling windows and moved walls to simplify the penthouse’s formal layout. “Lapo had a hand in every decision,” says Bianchi, noting that he deliberated over materials and hues for weeks, an attention to detail that impressed the job’s army of artisans. The sky framed by the new windows is amplified indoors in multiple shades of blue, from Tiffany to Yves Klein. “Blue is my signature color,” says Elkann, an avid sailor. “I don’t really like houses, so this place has been designed to resemble a boat and evoke the ocean.” Audacious zigzag-pattern floors and striped pantry walls follow chromatic suit, as does crockery monogrammed with his nickname, Laps.

Elkann’s enthusiasms drive every aspect of the decor. A caterpillarish Ueli Berger sofa, one of his favorite pieces, undulates against a living room wall clad in bamboo-forest wallpaper he had custom printed in varying blues. His adoration of architect Ettore Sottsass’s oeuvre is evident in everything from a commode that contains dozens of Italia Independent sunglasses to a geometric totem beside a terrace door, while Ed Ruscha aquatints of automobile insignias mingle with funky Gino Sarfatti lamps.

Bookshelves hold volumes about cars, design, history, and politics as well as novels by Elkann’s father, Italian intellectual Alain Elkann. Industrial designer Carlo Borromeo, a close friend, conjured the living room’s cocktail table and topped it with an aluminum appliqué in

the shape of Sicily, an insider reference to Elkann’s love for Southern Italy. The spiral staircase in his cavernous two-level closet is composed of dark and light mahogany, a combination inspired by classic Riva Aquarama boats, and the specially made crablike chandelier installed above it was sparked, Elkann says, by “something I made with the exhaust pipes of cars.” He also worked Italia Independent’s logo onto various chairs. That detail started out as a bit of a joke, he adds, “but it looks extremely good and is very discreet.”

Elkann’s high-energy rooms are a far cry from the gracious Agnelli estate near Turin—maintained by his maternal grandmother, Marella Agnelli, a Neapolitan princess turned international queen of style—but that’s the point. “My houses are my houses, and I don’t want them to be the houses of my family,” he says. “Not because I want to be different but because I want to be me.” Among his previous footholds were a Paris pad with a “very naughty” decor and a Manhattan flat occupied at a time in his life when “I didn’t love myself enough to make it colorful and creative.” He calls the Milan duplex his first grown-up home. “It’s a step into a man’s world,” he remarks. “But I’ve been careful not to lose my childlike spirit.”

Or neglect his heritage. A self-described “French Turinese Neapolitan Catholic Jew born in New York,” Elkann is ferociously pro-Italian when it comes to buying art. “At the moment, I’m collecting works by Michelangelo Pistoletto, and I’m longing for an Agostino Bonalumi painting,” he says. “I like my country and its creativity—we still have a lot to show the world.”

That said, the designer displays certain affinities for Stateside style. “I admire the comfort that Americans bring to their rooms,” explains Elkann. “Formality is a waste of time and not part of my life.” Edgy materials inventively used, however, are one of his constants. His desk is made of resin-coated Alutex, an aluminum-glass fiber, and Bianchi upholstered the screening room’s walls with recycled black Kevlar sails from *Stealth*, the superyacht that belonged to Elkann’s grandfather Gianni Agnelli; Ferrari-yellow piping relieves the fabric’s Stygian hue. “Color is a job, it’s not frivolous,” Elkann notes. “Putting the right color on a pair of glasses or on a car makes all the difference.”

He swiftly admits, though, that his aesthetic savvy does not extend to horticulture, “even though my grandmother has such an expertise and took me to some of the most beautiful gardens one could visit.” So Milan-based landscape designer Stefano Baccari came to the rescue when it was time to plant the large L-shaped terrace, cultivating a rus in urbe—fruit trees, meandering roses, and pots brimming with ferns, cherry tomatoes, rosemary, and basil—that echoes the fabled Jardin Majorelle in Marrakech, where his famously soignée *nonna* typically winters.

“When I wake up here, I see all this green,” Elkann says, happily, of the apartment’s leafy views. “I’m really proud of everything,” he adds. “Even the kitchen. Not because I cook well but because of the atmosphere. One day I hope to be married, and it would be nice if my wife and I can be playful like this in doing our own house.” ☐



Above: The living room's Ueli Berger sofa, bubble-shade floor lamps, and metal armchairs are from Galerie Yves Gastou, while the custom-made cocktail table is by Carlo Borromeo. The giant Pierre

Charpin floor lamp at far left is from Galerie Kreo; Andy Warhol screen prints hang on handmade wallpaper by Ars Color, and the side table is a Memphis prototype by Alessandro Mendini.

Below: In the same space, a Blair Thurman work is mounted above a daybed accented with pillows in a Le Manach fabric; Playmobil made the large toy soldier, and the tête-à-tête is by Verner Pantón.



The dining room stars a painting by Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat; model Ferraris are displayed on the custom-made ebony-and-steel table, and the zigzag-pattern floor—as in the adjoining living room—was hand-painted.



*Above, from left:* Anchored by a teak-top island, the boat-inspired kitchen is outfitted with a refrigerator in a custom finish; model Ferraris parade across the top of the cabinets. The guest bath

is a gallery of nudes by photographers Wayne Maser, Helmut Newton, and Willy Ronis. *Below:* Elkann and landscape designer Stefano Baccari designed the tile-paved terrace in the manner of the

Jardin Majorelle in Marrakech; surveyed by a Playmobil toy king, it is planted with fruit trees, ferns, and herbs. *Opposite:* Hand-painted stripes and a tricolor ceramic-tile floor enliven a corridor.





Above, from left: Installed over the mahogany spiral staircase that connects the two levels of Elkann's vast closet is a metal chandelier he conceived for Meritalia; the photograph at far right is by auctioneer-artist Simon de Pury.

The master bath features large works by Damien Hirst (left) and Olimpia Ferrari; on the tub is a Statue of Liberty by Arthur-Bertrand. Below: Recycled Kevlar sails line the screening room, where a tufted-velvet lounge joins Francesco Carrozzini's

portrait of Elkann, manga toys, and model boats. Opposite: A master bedroom wall is spanned by an Orsola Clerici mural of the Bay of Naples, a reminder of Elkann's grandmother Marella Agnelli, who was born a Neapolitan princess.

