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# MODERNISM AND MANHATTAN: THE ANDRE MELLONE TOUCH

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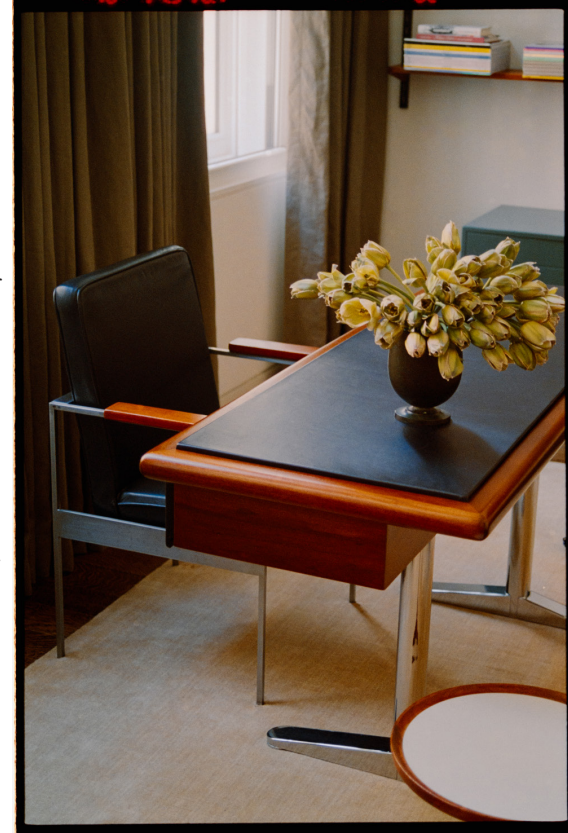


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hen I sit down for my conversation with New York-based architect Andre Mellone, he is sitting at his desk in front of a densely packed bookshelf. As he approaches the ten-year anniversary of his namesake agency, it is an exciting time: “*We have just hired new people, we are doing a lot of really great projects, and we are also moving offices in November, which is a big deal for us, as I have been in this space for ten years. There is a lot going on!*”

Since moving to New York at age 18, Mellone has developed a distinctive style that fuses his Brazilian heritage with the Art Deco influences of the city around him. His style can be described first and foremost as masculine, with great use of colors, textures, and materiality: warm yellows and greens are mixed with solid wooden furniture, often resulting in what I describe to him as a Sean Connery-era James Bond villain’s lair. “*That’s totally my vibe*” he laughs.

Describing his work, he says that “*the Brazilian thing is something almost instinctive. I’m not so consciously connected with it. From a more intellectual view of design and architecture, I’ve always had this interest in Art Deco, Bauhaus, and mid-century. These are eras where the way of thinking about design changed, and we looked at how things functioned. That is definitely something my father instilled in me.*” Growing up the son of famed industrial designer Oswaldo Mellone, the young Andre’s home was frequently filled with the















leading minds of Brazilian design, such as Jorge Zalszupin and Sergio Rodrigues. “I’ve always appreciated the straightness of their vision. It was this thing about finding the simplest forms and the simplest solution to a problem. That was something my father applied to his work and his designs that influences me every day.” This particular era of design left its mark on Mellone, helping to inform his chosen career path. “For me, the most important house is always going to be Lina Bo Bardi’s glass house in São Paulo. My dad joked that he probably learned how to draw before he could speak. Obviously, this kind of runs in my family, and I inherited it. I was always following him, and he understood that I liked it, so he would take me to visit museums and houses. I just remember the impact that Brazilian modernism had on me.”

When founding his own creative studio after years of working at large corporate architectural firms, one of Mellone’s first clients was the then-art dealer Vladimir Restoin Roitfeld, who, through a friend in common, sought him out to work on the Fifth Avenue townhouse that served him as both home and gallery. “I wanted to give the space a ‘salon’ vibe, and I liked Andre’s style from the very start,” says Vladimir, who now serves as CEO of *CR Fashion Book*, the biannual magazine endeavor launched by his mother, Carine. When signing his new Soho apartment (photographed for this story) in the fall of last year, “I knew I wanted to collaborate with him again. This is the first apartment that I bought, and that is very meaningful to me. I wanted to work with someone who already knew my taste and aesthetic, as well as someone with whom I was so comfortable, because when you work on your home with someone, it is really a relationship and a dialogue.”

“Vladimir and I connect from a style point of view,” says Mellone. “With this new space, we were very aligned. He showed me a mood board of things that he had seen, of things that we had done lately, saying with this idea of having warm and red tones.”

“I wanted my place to be minimalist but not cold. I wanted to play with colors, and this was the first point of discussion with Andre,” adds Vladimir. Using furniture and artwork from the previous townhouse, the pair worked on reupholstering

and using pieces that had personal attachments for the new owner. “I grew up in Paris in an apartment designed by David Chipperfield in the eighties that was very minimal, so that is part of my taste, but I wanted my home to feel warmer with a sixties spirit.”

When speaking of this decorative approach, I tell Mellone about once being scolded for miscalling an architect a decorator. “I think in an ideal world, the roles of architect and decorator coexist together and, more importantly, are developed together. I’m absolutely terrified of that image of an architect designing this beautiful building and then having a crazy interior designer. An interior design layout and architectural design must work together. I was an architect by education, and it took a while to commit this heresy of switching from architecture to upholstery and curtains. I’m always going to exist between these two worlds, but I’m never going to be a decorator’s decorator.”

