



As Seen In
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Late Edition
New York Today, morning snow showers, high 35. Tonight, breaking clouds, low 31. Tomorrow, mostly sunny, high 38. Yesterday, high 31, low 28. Weather map appears on Page C3.

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Bloomberg's Decorator Says, Hello, Gracie

JAMIE DRAKE is a casting agent's dream. He is a New York City decorator who exuberant color and showiness in his fake fur chubby, his orange-lined suits and his velvet paisley newsboy cap. As seen on the cover of the November issue of *Elle Decor*, Mr. Drake unleashed his most riotous impulses in his own home, a Manhattan loft done in throbbing pink, Tyrian purple and chrome yellow, the last thrown into high relief by a zebra-and-leopard-pattern rug. People don't come to me for beige or for Laura Ashley sweet," he told *Elle Decor* last fall. "I have very bold taste."

And now some wonder if he will exercise his signature audacity on a decorating makeover of Gracie Mansion, a wooden house built in 1799 by a Scottish-born sea merchant, Archibald Gracie, which has served as the official mayoral residence since 1942.

Michael R. Bloomberg's office said this month that the mayor-elect's transition team had begun consulting with experts to give the house a face-lift. The mayor-elect has said he will use it to entertain visiting dignitaries and for public functions.

"I'm thrilled that we are going to be involved in the renovation and restoration of one of New York's treasures," Mr. Drake told *The Daily News*. He later declined to discuss the project or to return phone calls from *The New York Times*. His status as decorator to Mr. Bloomberg, for whom he has designed three residences, leaves little doubt that when it is time to redecorate, he will get the job.

It might seem an improbable choice (after all, this is a man who spent his childhood years in a bedroom done up, at his own insistence, with black patent leather walls). Redecorating the gracious two-story pale yellow Federal house overlooking the East River requires a vision at once authoritative and self-effacing, one that can blend the client's personal taste with a restraint appropriate to a city landmark and public trust. Since Fiorello H. La Guardia moved into the house nearly 60 years ago, most of New York's chief executives have sought to take up that challenge with a view to elegance and historical authenticity.

"Every mayor brought his own decorator to Gracie Mansion," said Henry J. Stern, the parks commissioner, whose department maintains the house and grounds. "Everybody brings

the decorator du jour."

But Mr. Drake is hardly that. A dark horse in the New York design establishment, he has a sometimes florid style, which differs markedly from that of Albert Hadley, the doyen of New York decorators, who had a hand in the mansion's 1984 renovation. That undertaking, begun by Mayor Edward I. Koch, who established the Gracie Mansion Conservancy to oversee the project, was completed for \$5.5 million, most of it from private donors. It took into account the history of the mansion and struck a balance between gracious tradition and modern practicality. Highlights of the renovation included a dining room decorated by Mr. Hadley with French scenic wallpaper from 1830 and a hand-painted, marbled floor in the entrance hall. The most functional change was a passageway allowing visitors to go between the Wagner Wing, built in the 1960's, and the mansion without passing through the kitchen.



A graduate of the Parsons School of Design, Mr. Drake apprenticed with Angelo Donghia before establishing his firm, Drake Design Associates, in 1978. He describes himself as a traditionalist at heart. But even his most ardent fans would say that he uses that term loosely. In an interview last week, Margaret Russell, the editor-in-chief of *Elle Decor*, described Mr. Drake's Manhattan residence as "over the top, glamorous and swanky." In general, she added, "he likes to push things a little bit."

"Even in his more traditional work," she

added, "there is always something quirky or fun."

"Jamie has range," said Elizabeth Franklin, founding editor of *The Franklin Report*, a guide to New York City decorators and home services. He can do classical, and he can do unconventional, but he doesn't do anything without a flourish."

Still, the very flexibility that endears him to editors, who have put his work on their covers, and to clients, who reward him with fees in the six-figure range, has made him a cipher to the Park Avenue crowd. Unlike such establishment favorites as Mark Hampton, Mario Buatta, David Easton or Thierry Despont, each of whom has left an indelible imprint on the homes of New York's upper crust, Mr. Drake has yet to develop a solid design identity.

He has, to be sure, designed uptown projects. But he hasn't truly cracked the Upper East Side," Ms. Franklin said. "People don't know how to classify him. And because of that he is not regarded as one of the great designers."

Mr. Drake's relative obscurity did not deter Mr. Bloomberg, who hired him in the mid-1990's to renovate his imposing limestone town house on East 79th Street, where the mayor-elect says he will continue to live after taking office.

Mr. Bloomberg's choice of designer shows a certain confidence," said Mayer Rus, design editor of *House & Garden*. "Jamie Drake, particularly at that point, was hardly the socially advantageous choice."

All the same, Mr. Drake proved adroit in interpreting Mr. Bloomberg's somewhat grandiose vision in properties that include a horse farm in North Salem, N.Y., and a London town house in Cadogan Square, described by one insider as "an entertainment palace complete with marble pilasters and a sweeping central staircase." It is unclear who first approached Mr. Drake to design the New York City town house, or exactly who piloted the project. "Even back then," Mr. Rus remarked, Jamie remained extraordinarily discreet about his clients."

Working with the British antiques dealer, Philip Hewat-Jaboor, he indulged Mr. Bloomberg's penchant for opulence, filling the house's high-ceiling rooms with silk-velvet-covered chairs bordered in fringe, billowing draperies, French Savonnerie carpets and European paintings, and endowing the place with a grandeur worthy of the gilded age.

"Michael wants to live large, like a 19th-