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QUARTER MASTER

THOMAS JAYNE'S PIED-À-TERRE IN NEW ORLEANS IS A SLICE OF HISTORY REFRESHED FOR TODAY

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NOT LONG AGO, Thomas Jayne and Rick Ellis were relaxing in coral toile de Jouy armchairs in their New Orleans pied-à-terre. As morning light streamed onto walls painted the glowing pink of the inside of a conch shell, the men tried to explain how two major Manhattan aesthetes came to buy a home in the French Quarter in 2005, at the same time others were fleeing for higher ground.

The tall and bespectacled Jayne, a decorator based in New York, says his predilection for history made him fall in love with New Orleans and see the city's Katrina-inflicted wounds as part of a great continuum. Ellis, an accomplished cook and food stylist (he oversaw the period-perfect meals in Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence*), says he'd been roped in by the town's rich culinary traditions. But soon a deeper truth came out. Long before the idea of an apartment even entered their minds, the couple had succumbed to Mardi Gras and showed up year after year in elaborate costumes, such as eight-foot gold Mylar wings and embroidered satin capes. As their friend Peter Patout, the eminent New Orleans antiques dealer and old hand at Carnival costuming puts it, "They even make me look bad."

Jayne and Ellis have raised the bar in New Orleans's decorating circles too, by dipping into old Creole styles and spinning them with fresh juxtapositions and bewitching colors. Located on the second floor of an 1830s brick townhouse, their 1,200-square-foot apartment had all the essential regional graces, including a swooping exterior staircase. But it also was the victim of a 1960s renovation that junked many original details. After a sensitive makeover by the late architect Frank W. Masson that restored the rooms' lost elegance, Jayne lavished the walls and trims in rich, mellowed hues—warm pink, wheat-gold, Sèvres-porcelain-blue—and brought in a mother lode of family furniture and period antiques, including 19th-century gondola chairs and a low-waisted American Empire bookcase.

The living room's scenic wallpaper was designed
Thomas Jayne with Melissa Mittag of De Gournay, t
19th-century bookcase is from Peter Patout A
tiques, and the dado and ceiling are painted with I'
Got the Blues and Vellum by Benjamin Moore, respe
tively. Facing page, clockwise from top: A custo
made mirror by City Frame hangs between portra
by Thomas Frye in the sitting room. The kitchen ca
nets are based on 19th-century Creole exampl
the range and hood are by Viking, and the OYSTE
panel is by Miriam Ellner. The façade of the 183
townhouse where Jayne and Ellis live. See Resourc

A 19th-century gondola chair in the bedroom. Facing page: A digital print of a California vulture is displayed above a bed custom made by Harrison Higgins; the woven coverlet is antique, the linens are heirloom, and the bespoke block-print wallpaper is by Adelphi Paper Hangings. See Resources.

"I gravitate to things that are out of style," Jayne says. "The challenge is making them look fresh. Tradition always has to be updated and pushed forward. After all, you wouldn't send a debutante to her 80th-birthday party wearing her original dress."

For instance, Jayne had always wanted to live with scenic wallpaper like the kind he saw while growing up in 1950s Los Angeles. It so happens that in antebellum days, hand-blocked French scenics were hung in some of the finest houses in the South, so Jayne's penchant would also be period-accurate. "They transport an interior," he says. "But I didn't want to use that famous Zuber paper showing the monuments of Paris. In our little apartment, that would have been beyond the pale in terms of pretense."

Instead he came up with a site-specific wall covering, basing it on the C. H. DeWitt illustrations in a childhood book, *The Story of the Mississippi*. Produced with Melissa Mittag of De Gournay, a rollicking history of the mighty river now girdles the living-dining room. The panorama is populated by everything from 17th-century European explorers to white-columned mansions to sugarcane fields to 21st-century tugboats, all hand-painted in China. Due to cultural misapprehensions, Jayne points out, the white faces do look a tad Asian, and the Spanish moss resembles spinach.

"It's a great source of conversation," Jayne explains. "Scenic papers are so engaging." Assertive too—so much so that the wall covering dictated many of the decorating decisions. "We had to paint the other sitting room pink because no other color would go with it," he adds. "In the bedroom I used a reproduction 18th-century paper with a *jardin sauvage* flavor because it had the right vigor. It would have been pretty dismal to have white rooms all around."

The walls aren't the only element that sets tongues wagging around here—Ellis's gumbos, étouffées, and jambalayas do their part too. Though the kitchen is barely more than a galley, its custom-made cabinets sport elegant raised panels based on 19th-century Creole examples. And the oiled-cypress countertops are an unexpected surprise. "We wanted something that would tone down the kitchen and make it recessive," Jayne says, drily noting that the silvery wood got dinged the day Ellis decided to smash pecans on it for one of his recipes.

Wit allied with style is typical Thomas Jayne, which explains the portrait of a California vulture that hangs in the master bedroom. A digital print of an Audubon engraving, it is not the kind of art a less self-assured person would choose to display above the bed. But Jayne is delighted by the contrast—the masculine severity of this feathered beast against a flowered wall busy with dainty butterflies and moths. The print also is personal, which Jayne believes all the best decorating is. "I'm a Californian in New Orleans," he admits. "In this city, it's always wise to remember you're from elsewhere, a guest. It makes you watch your manners." ■