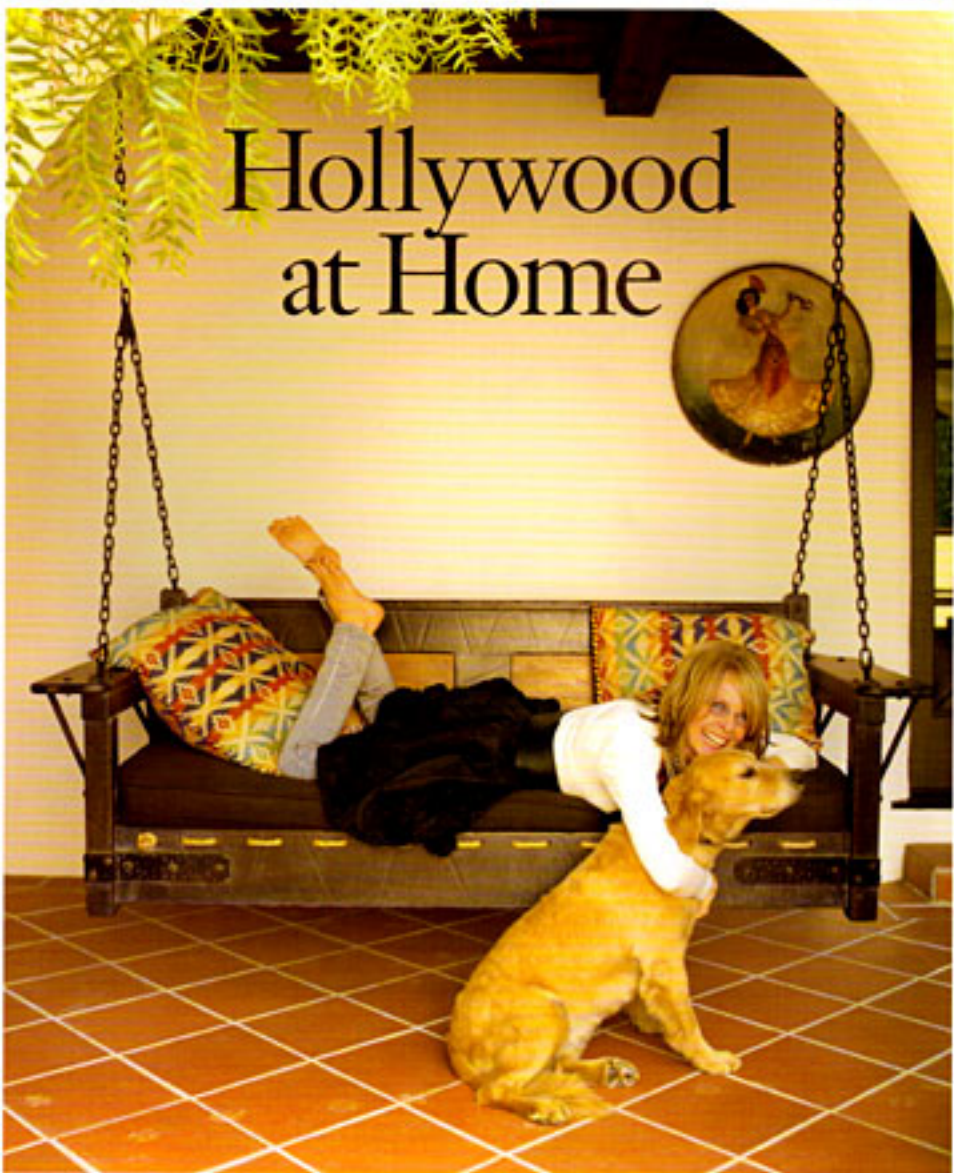


## Hollywood at Home





For the New York penthouse pied-à-terre of Neil Simon (above) and his wife, Elaine Joyce Simon—in the same building as their main residence—John Barman designed a “modern, warm, comfortable interior to write and casually entertain in,” he remarks. *Right:* A cityscape by Jan Matulka is in the living room.

Since my husband is a writer, he needs a calm, spunky place to work,” entertainer Elaine Joyce Simon says of her prerequisites for the pied-à-terre she shares with her husband, Neil Simon, located a mere 20 flights up from their original flat in the same building. “Neil likes to go into his cave, so our downstairs apartment is that of a writer, all dark and woody. When I showed it to John, I said: ‘Not this. This time I want everything light, airy, fun.’ And he said, ‘Like you. I’ll make it look like you.’ And when Neil and I finally walked through the door into this lean, blond space,” she laughs, “I thought, My God, it does look like me.”

When the Simons decided they needed more space, they stayed close to home, stepping up the penthouse at their current New York address. “What they wanted was a small second apartment in the same building,” explains New York-based interior designer John Barman, “a place to work that doubles as guest quarters for her children and friends. So it’s like going away without having to travel. They wake





# Neil Simon

A MODERN REFUGE IN MANHATTAN  
FOR THE CELEBRATED WRITER

Interior Design by John Barman, ASID/Text by Nancy Collins  
Photography by Billy Cunningham





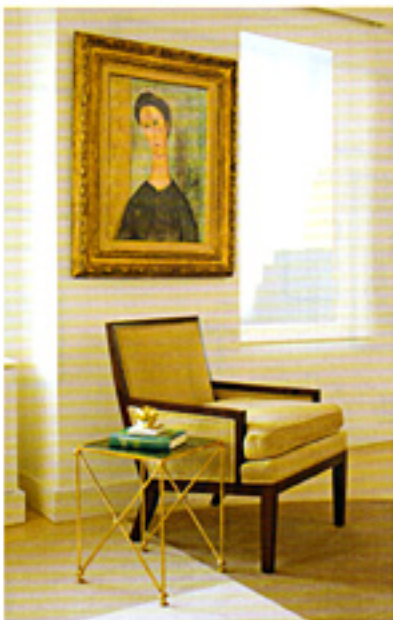
up downstairs, spend the day up... she in her office, he in his. In fact, Neil couldn't have cared less about the bedroom or living room; his main concerns were where he'd sit and on what he would write.

"Usually I dealt with Elaine, who was very involved and went with me to see everything," Barrman continues. "But one day she said, 'Neil's going with you alone to pick out his desk.' I said, 'I'm petrified.' She said, 'Don't be. He's fun.' And he was. At the end of the day he said, 'I'm going to write a play about your business. I even know the title: *16 to 18 Holes*, because everything I want takes forever.' With the desk finally in place, Barrman felt the

empty wall behind it needed something. "So I asked Neil, 'Do you have any stuff to hang?' He said, 'I don't know.' And I said, 'Go try and find something.' He did, and I filled up the wall, thinking, Maybe he has opinions about where all these awards should go. But all he said was, 'Gosh, how nice all my things are here.'"

The original penthouse, Barrman explains, "was a total disaster of a '70s apartment—a moldy rabbit warren of rooms with warped floors." (The sole remnant of the former space is the '60s chandelier hanging over the arched mirror in the entrance hall.) Today, thanks to its clean lines, white-stained plank floors, golden

tones and heavenly views, the five-room space is suffused with a kind of unbearable lightness of being, as it were—away from it all... warm, calm, serene. "This apartment is all about the spectacular views," says Barrman, "from every window, including the dining room. Elaine wanted it to be that, of course, but also asked for banquettes so you could lounge." Or, in her husband's case, pile up papers. "Because Neil writes by longhand, on a pad, he's always concerned about where his papers are," says the designer. "And if they're not on his desk or dining room table, they invariably end up in piles on the banquette."



For **LEFT**: The apartment is "a showcase of important 20th-century art," says Barzman, who arranged *de Dostoy's Chair* by Anthony Burgundy above a living room sofa. The work at center is by Louis Lozowick. Armchair, with Rogers & Goffigon fabric, and sofa from J. Robert Scott. **LEFT**: A Moulton portrait hangs above an armchair, from Holly Hunt, and a side table, from Maison Gerard.

"The other morning he woke up and said, 'I feel like buying a painting today,' and off we went looking," says his wife.

**RIGHT**: Barzman, who transformed the apartment from "estate condition" into a crisp, contemporary space, created a dining area "that takes full advantage of the views." From left are works by Myron Lecha, Gerhard Richter and Edward Fitzgerald. Holly Hunt chairs, with Osborne & Little fabric. Stark carpet.





**ABOVE:** Simon's study "provides enough space for Neil to write, a library and a place to display his awards and memorabilia," Barman notes. Stark carpet. **RIGHT:** The writer—who has won a Pulitzer Prize, three Tonys and multiple Oscar nominations—keeps some of his photographs, books and awards by the window.

**OPPOSITE ABOVE:** The master bedroom, decorated in whites, with punches of color in the pillows, maximizes the sunlight "that pours in from the windows," Barman says. Alain Bonenfant painted the mode. The bed is Barman's own design. Douglas lamps.



“Neil couldn’t have cared less about the bedroom or living room; his main concerns were where he’d sit and on what he would write.”



“The apartment was done around Elaine’s sensibility and the art,” Barman adds, pointing out the Modigliani, part of the couple’s collection of 20th-century paintings. “To best show it off, we used a neutral palette, balancing it with strong colors—ruby, amethyst, sapphire—pulled out of the paintings.” John is a primary-color person, so I really had to fight him, because I’m so not that,” chuckles Elaine Joyce Simon. “Trapezoid, blond, earth tones are what make me feel comfortable. The best thing about Neil is he’s color-blind. So we get along perfectly.” Nevertheless, her husband has “such a great eye,” she says. “He’s seen it all, knows when it’s good. The other morning he woke up and said, ‘I feel like buying a painting today,’ and off we went looking. Both of us could sit in art galleries and libraries all day.”

Until this project, Elaine Joyce Simon says she was “always more interested in the exteriors, not interior, of a house. I couldn’t pick out curtains to save my life, though I always knew what I liked. The initial time I shopped with John, he asked, ‘What do you like?’ I said, ‘I don’t know. Let’s just go look.’ And I’d point out a chair I liked here, perhaps just the legs of one there. When he came over and looked in my closet, he was stunned. ‘Where are your shoes? You don’t have any.’ And I told him, ‘I have all the important ones I need because I know what I like—a certain high heel and the rest of the time sneakers and flats.’”

Indeed, what still amazes Barman is the modesty of the celebrated couple—starting with their first encounter. “I got a message that a Mrs. Simon wanted a consultation, so, of course, I went for the

interview. Elaine was delightful—pretty, effervescent, up. Her husband, meanwhile, who had a cold, kept his head down the whole time, saying nothing—not at all friendly. I thought, Nice woman but don’t know about that husband. Anyway, as I’m leaving, I notice a lone poster, right by the front door: *Plaza Suite* by Neil Simon. Neither had said a thing. I thought to myself: How stupid can you be?”

When it came to giving the Simons what they wanted, however, Barman was absolutely “brilliant,” says Elaine Joyce Simon. “We both adore the apartment’s library feel, and it’s just such a fun place to go. Neil loves it. Every morning he goes up and works, and on weekends we go there and party. In the end, it’s the best of both worlds—exactly what we wanted—a hotel in the same building.” □