

Greatest Hitz

Alex Hitz's bright Park Avenue pied-à-terre is full of family heirlooms and pieces from antique shops and galleries.

Photo: Zandy Mangold



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Five years ago, when Alex Hitz, founder and CEO of the Beverly Hills Kitchen gourmet product line, was looking for a Manhattan apartment, he had several must-haves in mind.

One: It had to be on the smaller side (he wanted a pied-à-terre because he has another home in Los Angeles) but big enough to be comfortable. Two: It had to be on the Upper East Side. And three: It had to have lots of light.

"I get very sad if I don't have light," Hitz says.

He found everything he wanted in a Park Avenue condo that was created in 1948 by Emery Roth & Sons. The apartment is a comfortable 1,100 square feet, and the windows are, he notes, "unusually large with lots of light coming into the apartment." Some look down on townhouse gardens and others overlook Park Avenue.

“I’m in the city only four or five months a year,” Hitz says. “But I love New York. Even though I speak with a Southern accent — I’m originally from Atlanta — I feel like a real New Yorker.”

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It features one bedroom and one bathroom, a spacious living room and a foyer that’s big enough to use as a dining room. “It’s perfect for me,” Hitz says. “I love the location, I love the light, and it overlooks one of the prettiest streets in New York.”

He filled it with pieces from his family’s Atlanta home and items he’d collected in antique shops and galleries over the years.

“I go to auctions,” Hitz, 43, says. “I do love that. And I go to house sales. I bid sometimes and get maybe 1 or 2 percent of the stuff I bid on. I’m a bargain shopper.”

One of his bargains was the painting he bought specifically for this apartment. “It’s of a 17th-century English barrister,” he says. “I bought him because I needed something very big — 4-by-6 feet — to go over the couch. He certainly is not the most beautiful man I ever saw, but I love the classical architecture in the background. And because he’s not very beautiful, the painting was not very expensive.”

He also purchased a 19th-century French mahogany chest from auction house Doyle New York because it has deep drawers for storage, and a 1920s breakfast tray that he had made into a coffee table. From his family, there is his grandmother’s 19th-century English chest, known as a sherry set. “It’s filled with lots of little glasses for cordials or sherry,” he says. “But they’re all covered in tissue paper. And I’ve never unwrapped them.” A hand-carved French cabinet that his mother owned, and which has been in all of Hitz’s homes, fits in perfectly. “It’s so weird and narrow that it works best in a New York apartment,” he says.

And covering the wall facing the couch are various works of art from the 18th and 19th centuries alongside contemporary pieces. Among them: a Renoir drawing (hanging next to a pencil drawing that Hitz himself did of a shirt), a Joan Miró, a Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, a watercolor of a peacock by Ben Shahn, a Picasso titled “Symphony” (Hitz’s stepfather was famed conductor Robert Shaw), a cow painted by a folk artist in Georgia and a Willem de Kooning.

“I wanted this wall to be hung like a salon,” he says. “So then I could throw all these wonderful things that I love — regardless of what they are or what their provenance is — together. I was lucky to have a big enough wall to do that.”

Hitz, whose mother’s family was one of the original investors in Coca-Cola, is still a Southern boy at heart.

“Recently, when my book [‘My Beverly Hills Kitchen: Classic Southern Cooking with a French Twist’] was published, it was so important to me to go home and launch it there.

“There was a big benefit at the Atlanta History Center. My family was involved in that for many years. It was a dinner dance, and if you’ve ever heard of another cookbook that’s had a dinner dance I want to know about it.

“I have a very serious food passion and always wanted to write a book about that world in Atlanta that is no longer there. It was such a special place. And so I wanted to write a cookbook, but I wanted it to be a memoir, too. So this book is a cookbook disguised as a memoir.”

In the book, he talks about the luncheons (and menus) his mother and stepfather gave for musical stars like Leonard Bernstein, Leontyne Price, Aaron Copland and Bobby Short — who’d journeyed to Atlanta to play with Shaw and the Symphony Orchestra. “I remember thinking, ‘Oh my God, this is so exciting.’”

As time passed, Hitz’s passion for food took him to Paris, where he studied master French cooking at the Cordon Bleu. Back home in Atlanta, he opened a restaurant in 1992, the Patio by the River (which he later sold). Then he tried his hand at being a Broadway and LA movie producer and also a real estate developer. But those careers just didn’t click.

“I always wanted to get back into the food business,” Hitz says. “But I didn’t want to have another restaurant. That’s the worst business in the world.”

About four years ago, he heard about how successful selling and shipping frozen food could be. He went to a food consultant who got him on TV.

“I wasn’t sure if I could do it,” Hitz says. “But I agreed to try. So I went on TV, pitching boeuf bourguignon. I chose that dish because I knew it was a fabulous recipe.

“I had no idea that it would air three days after the ‘Julie & Julia’ movie came out. The movie was about Julia Child and her boeuf bourguignon, and almost everybody who saw it had a craving for the dish.

“That was the start of the Beverly Hills Kitchen (thebeverlyhillskitchen.com). Suddenly and surprisingly, we were a success. Now we’re also selling a line of kitchen appliances, tabletops [place settings, silver and china], cookware and gourmet comfort food. But it all started because of that one dish and that movie.”

HITZ’S FAVORITE THINGS

*A bronze sculpture of the Duke of Windsor in his coronation robes. It was a gift from the fashion designer Adolfo

*A portrait of Robert Shaw, Hitz’s stepfather, painted by George Beattie Jr.

*The wall of artwork

*A hand-carved cabinet that’s been in all of Hitz’s homes

*An architectural drawing with Hitz's initials on it

*A silver box that belonged to Bobby Short