

# METROPOLITAN PLACES

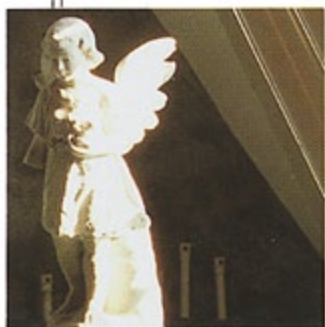


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E L I Z A B E T H H E Y E R T

**N E W Y O R K**





*Preceding pages: The stone table, from Gillette's previous Park Avenue apartment, is similar in design to the benches in the sculpture garden of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The green wall was, at one time, a terracotta red, but Gillette has begun to restrain the palette of colors in the loft. "I am a purist," he says, "and the mixture of colors and the feelings they evoked were not restful." The statue of the lady, also from Gillette's previous apartment, is from the 1920s. The architectural structure at the right is described by Gillette as "a small city."*

*Right: The floor was painted by Gillette and a friend using a mixture of dry pigment and iridescent blue eye shadow (a color Gillette says he would never apply to a model's face). The intended effect was that the concrete floor look like "still water."*

## G I L L E T T E

"The world can be hard on you," says Rick Gillette, a well-known makeup artist who lives in a loft high above the twisting maze of New York's financial district. "In New York, especially this part of New York," he says, gesturing toward the skyscraper view outside his penthouse windows, "I am surrounded by harshness. Up here I can shelter myself in an aura of peace, even if it is a bit unreal." For eight years Gillette

had lived in a dramatic, much-publicized Deco-style apartment on Park Avenue. "That was part of a childhood fantasy for me," he says. "You know the song 'Let's Go Slumming on Park Avenue'? I always knew I would move." The Wall Street area fascinated Gillette because of the intense activity surrounding the financial world, so far removed from the fashion scene he is a part of. He also liked the idea of living so close to the water. "Down here," Gillette says, "you realize that you are living on an island."

Several years ago he answered a newspaper ad that promised "a cabin in the sky." The advertised space was a long, narrow hall with twelve offices running down the length of a building, and a network of exposed water pipes lining the ceiling. To Gillette, who immediately envisioned the space with the walls torn down and the offices removed, the architecture was reminiscent of "a Gothic church—except for the pipes—with a main altar and four chapels." Gillette, who has always been drawn to Gothic architecture, and at one time considered buying a church, began an ambitious program of renovation to transform the offices, along the lines of his own vision, with the help of the California architect Frank Israel. Gillette wanted to create small areas within larger ones, similar to the small chapels within large Gothic cathedrals. "Then," says Gillette, "I saw a book about Luis Barragán. I decided to have a Barragán-style village within a Gothic structure."

Originally, Gillette used colors in the loft often associated with Barragán, such as vibrant terracotta on a wall that he has since painted over in a more somber forest green. As the project developed, Gillette became more interested in interpreting, rather than mimicking, Barragán's ideas in ways that would relate to his own. Water, an essential element in every Barragán space, was important to Gillette also. "I remembered seeing photographs in *Life* magazine of Venice after it had been flooded. I wanted my place to look as if it were sitting in water." The concrete floors were painted iridescent blue "to look like water over dirt." A fountain, with a trough in the Barragán style, surrounded by a Gothic-style vaulted ceiling and a stained-glass window, pours water into a bath pool, which to Gillette is the source that "begins the flood for the entire house." He has carried out this fantasy to such an extent that the pool is designed to overflow into a carefully concealed gutter at its base, which catches excess water before it can actually do damage.

Gillette's home is his passion. He devotes much of his spare time to making what appears to an outside observer to be infinitesimal changes to an already exceptional space. Most likely Gillette left his Park Avenue apartment, with its muraled walls and Cubist painted doorways, because it was finally perfect—nothing more could be done to improve it. Now Gillette is in the process of acquiring American mission furniture for his loft and constructing another "chapel." When that is done, and the project is finally finished, chances are he'll look for another home.



Right: Gillette's idea for the seating area was to use "furniture as pieces of art." The early mission chair in the foreground is English, from the end of the nineteenth century, with modern upholstery. The couches are covered with African cloths made in the Ivory Coast from hand-woven cotton and painted with mud dye. The lamp is American mission style.





*Left: The niche, one of a pair located in the hall, was designed to resemble a confessional. From the hall, one can see into the courtyard and beyond to a fireplace surrounded by a seating area.*

*Right: The influence of Luis Barragán can most clearly be seen in the plain stair without a rail, similar to the stair in Barragán's own Mexico City home. The structure behind the stair, which is at the center of the loft, is described by Gillette as "a building within a building, with a courtyard in front of it." To the right of the stair is a sliding gate that separates the courtyard from the hall. The stair leads to a small room intended as a study but currently used as a storage area.*

*Far right: The idea for a bathing pool filled by water cascading from a trough was inspired by the pools of Luis Barragán, and designed to simulate the feeling of showering outside. This pool is actually a Jacuzzi. A conventional shower is located in a niche in the left wall adjacent to the pool. The pipes were a part of the original architecture that has been allowed to remain. The angel sculpture is a nineteenth-century garden statue.*



