



The Wit Factor

A skilled designer can enable a space to express its owner's personality. So what does the home of noted designer and gay-issues activist Jamie Drake say about him? **BY MATT GURRY**

JAMIE DRAKE HAS DESIGNED GLAMOROUS SPACES across the nation, but in 1975, he was a young man who had just moved from Connecticut to New York City to study at what Parsons then

called its Environmental Design department. The program was of the Bauhaus school of thought (that dictates designers should be able to create anything from products to light-

ing to graphics to interiors). From there, his skills have earned the trust of Mayor Michael Bloomberg on projects both private and public.

A quick scan of Drake's West Chelsea loft (pictured) says, "comfortable and tastefully appointed." But look closer, and you begin to realize that you're in a wonderland. Take the mounted stag, poised above the sofa. Even if you find taxidermy somewhat off-putting, it's hard not to appreciate the bust once you realize that it is actually wrapped in leather, zipped up from the base — as though it just arrived from the Black Party. The piece is a sculpture by artist Michael Combs. "There's not a dead animal under there," Drake reassures me. "It's carved." For him, it's a statement about the dangers of hunting — and the danger of S&M. We share a chuckle over it.

This type of playfulness defines Drake's space — though he doesn't try to beat visitors over the head with it. It's a dry, visual wit. He's not looking for "belly laughs," he says, but he wants to put a smile on your face. This is in contrast to the humor of a designer like Jonathan Adler (whom Drake describes as "a wonderful person"), whose humor is more broad and in-your-face: Think of Adler's now-retired cookie jar labeled "Wellbutrin."

Instead, Drake aims to teeter on the edges of boundaries. If a client describes his aesthetic as "serious," Drake will push the design just to the edge of what might be called "grandiose."

In a West Elm world of ecru and eggshell, Drake finds he can "get bored easily." So he combats visual boredom with clever drops of bold color meant to keep the eye constantly moving. Vibrant throw pillows lead us across his sofa to a bright painting of gnomes that, in turn, points us to the adjacent wall of windows showcasing the colors of Hudson River Park just outside.

We each have a unique tolerance for how much bold design our rooms can take — a hard line where "playful" turns to "childish." But if we, like Drake, are unafraid to explore our own boundaries, our homes can also express the joy of our inner child while looking sophisticated and all grown up. ■

Learn more about the work of Jamie Drake by visiting drakedesignassociates.com.