

GUY DÉCOR

Kips Bay: Buatta, Goatskin and an \$85,000 Stove

By RICK MARIN

ONE of the props in this year's Kips Bay Decorator Show House is "Into Thin Air," the book by Jon Krakauer. It sits on a night table in a leopard-print "boudoir" designed by Tonin MacCallum up on the fifth floor. But you don't have to climb that high to feel the rarefied atmosphere in this annual charitable event, set up this year in an 1896 mansion at 4 East 75th Street. The air gets pretty thin as soon you walk in the front door.

Last Tuesday morning, two weeks before the official opening, I was standing in the house's entry admiring the "digital marquetry" — more on this later — on the 10-foot double doors when Ann Cutbill Lenane, a realtor with Douglas Elliman, came through on her way out. Ms. Lenane stopped long enough to say that the house, which has been on the market since October and is her listing, is considered a "double mansion," because at 50 feet wide it's twice the width of a "regular mansion."

I asked the gauche question and was told, with an "if-you-have-to-ask" look, \$55 million.



Keith Meyers/The New York Times

TRADITIONAL Mario Buatta designed a cozy 19th-century sitting room with green velvet walls, a gilt mirror and Regency-style drapes.

"That went for 40," Ms. Lenane said briskly, eyeing her P.D.A. "When you're thinking about buying your \$50 million mansion, you really don't want to be on Fifth Avenue." Too many noisy parades, she said.

This year's show house, the 34th, is open to the public — even paradegoers — from April 25 to May 23. For a good cause, the Kips Bay Boys and Girls Club in the southeast Bronx, two dozen decorators have pried themselves away from the D & D building long enough to create rooms called "the petit salon" and "a landing for living and lounging."

After Ms. Lenane moved on, I went back to chatting with Alan Carroll, a painter. His company, Red Branch Decorative Imaging, scans thousands of pieces of wood and can manipulate their images into any pattern — light wood leaves on a dark wood background,

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Eager to seem conversant in super-high-end real estate, I wondered aloud how the house's 20,000 square feet compare to the Duke mansion on Fifth Avenue, which Lenny Kravitz considered buying last year when it was listed at \$50 million.

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say — directly onto veneer. So each faux floorboard in the entry has a different grain, although they're printed in sheets. The same is true of the intricate "inlay" on the big double doors.

"We can do stuff that was impossible then and is impossible now," Mr. Carroll said when I asked whether the effect could be achieved the traditional way, with a team of workers like Keebler elves.

The techno trompe l'oeil continued in Susan Gutfreund's transformation of the windowless former stable at the back of the house into an elegant living room with a view. She installed windows and, behind them, a 40-foot photographic landscape mural from Environmental Graphics approximating what the house's owner, the investor Jaqui Safra, sees from his house in Ireland.

This lush vista is lit by L.E.D.'s programmed to progress in brightness and hue from dawn to midday to dusk. Philips Electronics is one of the show house sponsors and provided the flat-screen TV's that appear throughout the house. The company also seems eager to promote this next-wave lighting, which, it says, has bulbs that last 100 times longer than incandescent ones and use 10 percent of the energy.

I walked through the two dozen rooms in this designer Disneyland when it was still under construction, while many of the decorators were worrying over their half-finished creations. Ms. Gutfreund was the most hospitable, offering a slice of homemade mud pie, and Mario Buatta — the society staple — the most offhand. In his green sitting room, he pulled out a sort of origami model of the room, which had folding walls sketched with renderings of the décor.

"I do this," he said of the model, "because with the show house, you can't make any mistakes. When the client's paying, if I change something, I just charge them."

Mr. Buatta can get away with remarks like that. Until recently, he was the biggest name in the show house. But he doesn't have a TV show. Thom Filicia, of "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy," may have eclipsed him, in name recognition if not in talent.

Mr. Filicia described his living-dining-whalebone-display room as "TriBeCa meets Park Avenue." Now, I live almost exactly halfway between those two Manhattan neighborhoods, so this look should be perfect for me. But it's one thing to use a Crate & Barrel pillow as an affordable accent piece, as Ms. Gutfreund does, next to \$1,000 Fortuny cushions. It's another to have a room that looks like glorified Crate & Barrel — to my straight eye anyway. I did, however, like Mr. Filicia's shirt and jacket a lot.

In the kitchen, by St. Charles of New York, I geeked out on the appliances, all supplied by Electrolux, another sponsor. I thought the company just made vacuum cleaners. Turns out it's a \$15 billion Swedish conglomerate that sells stoves, refrigerators, ovens and a venerable French line called Molteni, which includes, among other things, "made-to-measure" stoves.

A Molteni Podium II dominates the kitchen: a freestanding 4-by-8-foot oval in red enamel, it has a chrome grill and induction cooktop that can boil a big pot of water in two minutes. Its magnetic elements go cold as soon as they're turned off. The catch is that you need "ferrous" pans for the magnetic heat to work. Also, \$85,000.

The other kitchen-geek attraction is the milk-glass countertop and backsplash. It's unstainable, according to one of the kitchen's designers, Robert Schwartz, and more



CONTRASTS A black-and-white bedroom by Larry Laslo, left, mixes dark walls, a white goatskin rug and Philippe Starck's black Baccarat chandelier. High entryway doors, below, are covered with a digitally created wood grain.



Photographs by Keith Meyers/The New York Times

NOVELTIES The "Queer Eye" star Thom Filicia uses trophy antlers and a glass-and-steel chandelier for an industrial-organic look, above. A mammoth red enamel Molteni cooking station (\$85,000) rules the kitchen, left. Katina Arts-Meyer's collectibles, upper left, include a 1955 pilot's ejection seat.

Laboratory," where, among the beakers and other mad-scientist paraphernalia, there is a framed photograph of Emperor Hirohito. Why?

In the top-floor reading room by Shaver/Melahn Studios stands a \$1 million Roman torso, which seems like an expensive cheap trick.

In Katina Arts-Meyer's collection of collectibles at the foot of the grand staircase is a 1955 pilot's ejection-seat prototype that looks like something Hannibal Lecter might have designed if, like Todd Oldham, he were doing a line for L.A.-Z-Boy.

Amazingly, for this baby-crazed town, no one did a nursery or playroom, though the long back room Charlotte Moss turned into a "boudoir" tribute to Pauline de Rothschild, a bed-hopping socialite of the last century, is perfectly proportioned for one. The \$500,000 rug would probably have to go, though, even in an age of washable play dough.

But then, what are servants for?

lustrous than Corian.

Because Mr. Schwartz was so into his red "Romancing the Kitchen" theme, I mentioned that in my kitchen I use a red Zodiaq quartz countertop — a DuPont product that looks better than stone and never has to be sealed. He gave me the kind of "but-enough-about-you" look I've gotten in celebrity interviews when I've strayed off message.

My favorite room — besides the mod red bathroom by Kyra and Rob Harnett of Twenty2, a husband-and-wife team from

Williamsburg, Brooklyn — was Larry Laslo's black-and-white bedroom. Starting with the house's original black marble fireplace, Mr. Laslo covered the walls in a charcoal tweed that, he said, "feels almost like towel-eling," and the floor in white goatskin. In the center of the room, he hung Philippe Starck's black Baccarat chandelier, which Mr. Laslo said is actually deep blue. "They can't do black glass," he said, even for \$68,000. He bookended his black bed with white Gio Ponti night tables.

These rooms are their creators. The ebullient Mr. Laslo's black is more cheerful than the riots of print and pattern elsewhere.

Most of show house is preaching to the choir: design for doyens. Traditional sameness is punctuated by the occasional strain for novelty, like the small sea-creature-themed dining table set in John Landrum Bryant's "sanctuary" bathroom.

Campion Platt turned what was a butler's pantry, closet and elevator shaft off the kitchen into something called "Mr. Woo's