

Matthew White

It's a Mod, Mod World for the Designer and Thomas Schumacher in London

Text by Christopher Petkanas/Photography by Andrew Twort

EVEN IF INTERIOR DESIGNER Matthew White chafed at having to turn things around so quickly, he was not exactly in a position to say no. In 2003 Thomas Schumacher, his partner of 23 years, asked him to furnish a 900-square-foot London flat in three days—max.

Schumacher, a theatrical producer and the president of Disney Theatrical Productions, rented the Covent Garden flat so he would not have to stay in a hotel while working on the Sir Richard Fyre stage version of *Mary Poppins*. Schumacher put a rush on the job he gave White because he was determined to short-circuit any possibility of its ballooning into an expensive extravaganza. As you might imagine, Schumacher gets enough of that at work. All he wanted was a place to live, something stylish, functional and low maintenance.

"Friends tried to talk Tom into getting an apartment in one of their posh neighborhoods, but he found this penthouse on the Internet and signed the lease," says White. How could Schumacher not? Steps away are the Prince Edward Theatre, where *Mary*



Poppins is playing, and the Lyceum, where Schumacher has his office and another of his musicals—*The Lion King*—is in its eighth year.

In New York, White and Schumacher live in great, theatrical splendor on lower Park Avenue, on a slice of the piano nobile of an 1891 Italian Renaissance Revival mansion by McKim, Mead & White (see *Architectural Digest*, September 2003). But the duplex's carved coffered ceilings do nothing to prepare you for what Matthew White has conjured in London. There, Eros chairs with swiveling egg-shaped seats by Philippe Starck are pulled up to a Saarinen Tulip table, a frothy flokati rug drifts over

"It was like a vanilla envelope, a blank slate," designer Matthew White (above) says of the small apartment he and his partner, Thomas Schumacher, share in London's West End.

Left: A red 1969 UP4 sofa by Gaetano Pesce and a flokati rug add a whimsical touch to the living area. White designed the bronze low table and the convex mirror.



the floor like a meringue, and Gaetano Pesce's 1969 UP4 sofa does a very good imitation of a lipstick-red hot dog bun. A designer changing his skin is not news, of course, but White's about-face is on another level—more extreme, more audacious. Think of *Barbarella*. Now think of *Austin Powers*. The flat suggests what might result if time were telescoped and these two personalities set up housekeeping together.

White insists he remains what most people know him to be, a devoted classicist, and that the mod—not to say mad—feel of the place is not all that surprising given its constraints. "The apartment itself—one long room with a



sitting area, a dining area and a kitchenette, plus a tiny office, a bedroom and a bath—didn't have a lot going for it," he says. Hunched ceilings, plain windows and weirdly placed columns were the worst of it. "Tom and I have always had fantasies of living in an Old World London pied-à-terre," White explains. "But rather than tart this place up and make it something it's not, I embraced its modern, white-box quality. A miniloft or gallery-like space with a Pop vibe suggested itself."

Schumacher was not a totally heartless taskmaster; he gave White an assistant for the 72-hour blitz. For a designer known for big custom pieces and important antiques, it could not have been easy limiting himself to what could be carried out of, or immediately shipped from, nearby stores, but White survived. Deciding where all the furniture would go "was simply a matter of flinging it around," he says. "Everything seemed

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RIGHT: A photograph by Annie Leibovitz and a globe lamp top the night table by Los Angeles artist Clare Graham. "The table has a sculptural form," White points out.



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to find a place for itself."

If there is one big idea driving White's scheme for the main room, it's the artless white pinch-pleated sheers hanging from a serpentine track that wraps the space on three sides "like a giant shower curtain," he says. At night

they glow a pretty pink from the sign for *The Mousetrap* across the way.

The volume is turned noticeably down in the bedroom, where a glamorous mirrored screen caches a wardrobe, two night tables by Los Angeles artist Clare Graham are faced in tin-can lids, and the bedcov-

ering and headboard are done in rich chocolate wool crisply trimmed in ivory, a page out of David Hicks. Needing a base to steady a plastic globe lamp, White inverted a wood salad bowl. It wasn't customizing on the scale he's used to. But on this lightning commission, it passed handily for a reward. □

ABOVE: "It has a tailored feel," the designer says of the bedroom. The headboard and mirrored screen are by White. Ralph Lauren Home bedcovering fabric; Houles trim.