

To Have and to Hold

From brilliant blown glass to sleek silver, hardware goes glam. Designer Miles Redd is a convert.

You could be forgiven for thinking it's hard to get excited about hardware, especially since the past decade's most striking examples—oversize stainless-steel pulls, tired cast iron—look about as splurge-worthy as an industrial dishwasher. But, according to a few star designers, that's all about to change.

Miles Redd, a proponent of the glossy, glammed-up look making its way into the apartments of some of New York's most stringent modernists, makes a persuasive argument in favor of hardware extravagant enough to rival your mother-in-law's Flora Danica. "How many times a day do you touch a doorknob?" he asks. But the real question is: How many times a day do you feel blessed by your doorknobs?

If you live in a Redd-designed pad, chances are the answer is, several. Redd graces the homes he works on with small, glamorous touches. An enormous silver-plated doorknob adorns the front door of his NoHo town house. Like him, many of the city's top designers are scouring artisanal workshops for, say, sparkling rock-crystal curtain ties and drawer pulls that look like they fell off a Murano chandelier. A few of these small prizes can transform a simple space. A white apartment with blue glass doorknobs could go, in Redd's words, "from a white box to a visionary white box."

Case in point: the Carl Martinez showroom, on the far eastern reaches of Canal Street. Martinez produces his sculpture and decorative hardware at a foundry in Brooklyn and sells it all in

his spotless white Chinatown studio. Illuminated by six-foot single-pane windows overlooking the hectic neighborhood below are trays of his work: doorknobs, pulls, and finials of handblown glass, rough rock crystal, and silver-plated brass. Martinez explains the hardware inspiration that struck him 10 years ago: "I was doing furniture, but I couldn't haul it around."

He still does sculpture, and it can be hard to distinguish some of his more fabulous functional work from his art. Or his jewelry: "This could be a ring!" Redd says, holding an orange crystal drawer pull to his finger. "Not everyone gets it," he admits. "But not everyone gets couture, either."

The hardware at E. R. Butler & Co., on Prince Street, on the other hand, is traditional and weighty: "way more classical," Redd says. "Flemish, Dutch, French, Georgian. Louis XV!" And, for a conservative look, beautifully proper.

It's telling that Butler's showroom is on one of the busiest shopping blocks in Manhattan, yet his sign is subtle and his shades are drawn. That's

Butler's kind of beauty, understated but richly rendered—"one of the last great strongholds," Redd sighs.

The styles inside are modeled on the best of eras past: 19th-century Greek revival pieces with doorknobs in clear mercury glass; a doorstop bumper snagged from the Woolworth estate. There are modern touches, too: drawer pulls covered in leather and white mink, or in raw coral and silver with the voluptuous curve of an Elsa Peretti bean, designed for Redd's own pad. In other words, the most traditional hardware can look modern—even hip—when it's got good bones. Everything here has a weight, a solidity, a presence. Redd sighs at the sight: "Couldn't you just see it in Versailles?"

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Miles Redd at E. R. Butler's Prince Street showroom. Opposite: A selection of handblown glass knobs, pulls, and finials from Carl Martinez.