

HABITATS/West Village

Decorated in Technicolor

By DAN SHAW

A COUPLE of weeks ago, more than two years after moving into his West Village apartment, Tom Dolby gave his first big party.

"Some people have housewarming parties the week they move in," Mr. Dolby wrote in his e-mail invitation to friends. "Others like to wait until every last room has been wallpapered, light fixture has been replaced, and piece of furniture has been selected. As most of you know, I fall into the latter category."

Mr. Dolby's home is theatrically and painstakingly decorated. "It reminds me of a Doris Day movie for some reason," said Mr. Dolby, a 31-year-old novelist who has the low-key charm and winning good looks of a latter-day out-of-the-closet Rock Hudson.

It's easy to imagine Doris and Rock necking here. The apartment evokes a bygone era when women wore gloves and men wore hats and they could always find Checker cabs in the rain. From the jazzy black-and-white striped wallpaper in the foyer to the suave grass-cloth walls in the study to the optimistic powder-blue living room, the apartment seems rendered in Technicolor.

"Miles had me paint the ceiling blue, too," said Mr. Dolby, referring to Miles Redd, his decorator. "Painting the ceiling the same color as the walls is one of his theories."

Mr. Dolby is happy to admit that he worked with a decorator and to shatter the myth that all gay men are born with pitch-perfect taste. In his 2004 debut novel, "The Trouble Boy" (Kensington Books), he shattered another myth: that all those cute gay Manhattan men in their 20's who go out to clubs and premieres every night are having a good time and great sex.

"People say I'm the gay Candace Bushnell," he said, referring to the author of "Sex and the City."

In decorating his apartment, Mr. Dolby said he especially appreciated Mr. Redd's



being open to all his suggestions. For instance, those striped walls in the foyer and the kitchen — very uptown, very Dorothy Draper-ish — were Mr. Dolby's idea.

"My friends make fun of them," he said. "But this was my first adult apartment, and a black-and-white foyer was my New York fantasy."

His apartment may be many people's quintessential New York fantasy. It's a 1,200-square-foot corner apartment in a classic 1931 doorman building, with two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a sunken living room with a wood-burning fireplace, a windowed kitchen and unobstructed views of Lower Manhattan, the Hudson River and New Jersey.

"I am really spoiled by that view," he said. "I had been living in Los Angeles before, and I wanted space and light, and I was lucky to find what I wanted."

Mr. Dolby was born lucky. His father, Ray, is the founder of Dolby Laboratories, the pioneering audio company that went public last year, and he helped his son buy the apartment for \$1.5 million three years ago.

Tom Dolby said he inherited his interest in home design from his parents, who live in San Francisco: "They are obsessive about

details. They renovated their house for five years. The ironic thing is that we never had good sound systems."

Books, not music, are Mr. Dolby's obsession. "It's always a selling point for a writer when a house has built-in bookshelves," he said, pointing to the original bookcases in the living room. He has organized the volumes by the color of their spines so they look like objets d'art.

"You begin to remember what's a red book and what's an orange one," he said, making it clear he's hip to the paradox of a serious writer's arranging novels by color. "In my study, the books are organized by subject."

Mr. Dolby moved to New York, after graduating from Yale in 1998, to pursue the writer's life during the dot-com boom. He lived on lower Fifth Avenue and was a founder of citytripping.com, a short-lived Web site. He did publish a downtown guidebook called "City Tripping New York," and not coincidentally the protagonist of "The Trouble Boy" reviews nightclubs for a Web site that tanks.

To write his coming-of-age novel, he be-

EVOKING ANOTHER ERA
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lied he had to leave town and get some perspective.

"I enrolled in the master's program at U.S.C. and moved to Los Angeles on September 10, 2001," he said. "I wrote the book that year and realized I was not an L.A. person. I gave it my best shot. The dating scene was very difficult. All the guys were actors, and I just couldn't relate. At the gym, I was the only person reading a book on the elliptical machines. Most people were reading screenplays."

When he returned to New York, he found a community of writers at the Village Quill, a TriBeCa loft with work stations and WiFi, though his study at home, with its sunset views and snappy black-and-red bookshelves, is an enviable place to work. He explains that he likes to write new material at the Quill and work on revisions at home.

"Then I spread out all over the apartment," he said. "I pace and talk to myself and speak dialogue out loud."

Mr. Dolby is currently helping to edit an anthology called "Girls Who Like Boys Who Like Boys: True Tales of Love, Lust and Friendship Between Straight Women and Gay Men," which Dutton plans to publish

next spring. He is also working on a second novel set at a New England boarding school.

He confesses that he usually parks his laptop at the little cafe table in his kitchen. "I like the energy of that space," he said. "It has the most light." From there, he can look down the galley kitchen to the river or survey the living room that Mr. Redd pulled together for him in his trademark preppies-gone-wild fashion.

"The living room was painted white and very blah when I moved in," Mr. Dolby said. "Miles brought out the elegance of the space. Elegance is his thing."

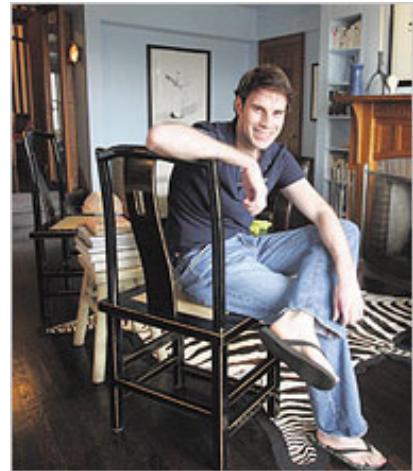
So are theatrical unveilings. "Miles does these installations," Mr. Dolby explained. "He sends you away, and he takes what you've got and finds what else you need. He brings in all this new furniture and sets up the room, and then you decide what you like and want to keep. It was weird to have my apartment empty and return to it full of furniture. That's how I got the sofa, the zebra rug and Chinese chairs."

He was torn about those sculptural wooden Chinese chairs, because although they look smart, they are not very comfortable.

"Those chairs are for people you don't really like," Mr. Dolby said with a laugh. "I

CHANNELING DOROTHY DRAPER

Tom Dolby arranged the volumes in his living room bookshelves by the color of their spines. The striped walls in the kitchen, below left, and the foyer are a nod to Dorothy Draper, the New York decorator known for her theatrical interiors of the 30's, 40's and 50's.



ONLINE: AUDIO SLIDE SHOW

→ [Tom Dolby on his vision for his apartment and the art on the walls.](#)
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had to go out and buy two comfortable leather clubchairs for reading and watching television."

Mr. Dolby said he hoped his apartment wouldn't be a bachelor pad forever.

"When I settle down with someone and have a kid," he said, "it won't seem like so much space."