

PIED-À-TOWER



A Karl Springer chess and backgammon table sits fireside for glowing game night revelry. Artwork, Damien Hirst. RIGHT: A large French lacquered screen curves over a custom sofa in the living room. Coffee table, Yves Klein



INTERIOR DESIGN BY **CARRIER AND COMPANY** • ARCHITECTURE BY **JEFFREY FLANIGAN ARCHITECT**
LANDSCAPE DESIGN BY **NEW YORK DECKS** • PHOTOGRAPHY BY **THOMAS LOOF**
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Grecian fluting, glinting metalwork, and eye-popping modern art: A 1901 **seven-story townhouse** on New York's Upper East Side rediscovers its true north at the hands of Jesse Carrier and Mara Miller.



The words *storybook house*

generally refer to an abode lifted from a fairy tale. But imagine instead an Edith Wharton novel set on a sci-fi spaceship following a collision with an asteroid, and you'll have some idea of the dramatic paradoxes encountered by design firm Carrier and Company when it began renovating a townhouse on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Built in 1901 the Beaux Arts house was originally embellished inside and out with opulent details. It was chopped up midcentury into nine apartments and gutted about a decade ago to become a stark, ultraminimalist single-family home. Then the building next door burned to the ground, leaving it smoke- and water-damaged—and back on the market.

Enter a young midwestern family with a taste for adventure and a longing for a Manhattan pied-à-terre. "Our two kids were growing, and we wanted them to experience more of the world," says the client. Serious art collectors, they fell in love with the house's aesthetic sophistication, chic proportions, and top-flight features (including a swimming pool, basketball court, media room, and backyard, along with a capacious ground-floor gallery). But

its interiors felt sterile, so they tapped Jesse Carrier and Mara Miller, principals of Carrier and Company, to weave in layers of comfort and warmth and turn an architectural icon into a family refuge.

Parents themselves, Carrier and Miller relished the challenge. "We do a lot of problem-solving with design," says Miller. And while they didn't move walls or reconfigure spaces, they introduced the kinds of smart, thoughtful details that transform the day-to-day lived experience of a house. "We aimed to soften and humanize the interior architecture," says Miller, "to create something a little warmer and more inviting."

Stark white surfaces acquired textural richness. Starting in the entry, the designers clad the walls in hand-polished plaster, which they carried through to the open, loftlike public-facing spaces. "It creates all these different tonalities of white," says Carrier, "bringing reflectivity and sparkle." They resurfaced the elevator shaft in fluted, hand-drawn plaster with a matte, chalky finish in contrast to the walls' sheen, creating a kind of attenuated Grecian column rising gracefully through all seven stories.

In the media room they upholstered the walls in an acoustic fabric chosen to complement the color of the existing stone fireplace. "Behind that upholstery the room is completely packed out with A/V equipment," says Carrier. Matching wool curtains have a shimmery embroiderer edge that shades softly into the fabric. Cashmere-covered furnishings reinforce the sense of sensory delight.

The house's previous high-contrast palette also found softer expressions.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A vintage-inspired "spider" chandelier rains delicate light on a walnut tapered-leg table. Chairs, Studio Van den Akker. • Brushed brass cabinetry (Amuneal) radiates warmth in the bar. • The stone-clad kitchen (Christopher Peacock) features a mix of dolomite, arabescato, and sivec surfaces. Pendants, Carrier and Company for Visual Comfort & Co. • An amber Fred Eversley sculpture and a Murano glass chandelier in the primary bedroom. **OPPOSITE:** Polished plaster walls (Jonas Everets) bounce light in the entry to the townhouse, included in the firm's latest book, *Defining Chic* (Rizzoli, 2023).



A groovy wet bar (Amuneal) and spherical ottoman (Lepere) turn the pool lounge into a social hub. Upholstery fabric, Holland & Sherry. **OPPOSITE, FROM TOP:** A newly carved French limestone fountain anchors the rooftop terrace. Furniture, David Sutherland. Embossed metal Kirdi shields and other African tribal art command the glass and steel stairs.



In the living room, for example, rich neutrals—mink- and mushroom-hued upholstery, a pair of fringed suede ottomans in pale gray, a fireplace framed in patinaed white bronze—are offset with shades of coffee and iron. Over the sofa the designers mounted a French lacquered curved screen from the 1930s; its tapestry-like garden scenery of trees and birds in blacks and golds brings complexity and depth to the space, and its concave surface seems to gently embrace the room.

Elsewhere, too, curves and rounded edges replace straight lines and sharp corners. In the gallery a bowed sofa and circular table invite guests to appreciate nearby works by James Turrell and Damien Hirst. Upstairs, the French-style walnut dining table traces a long oval. Twisting up through all seven stories is the house's showstopping staircase, an oval spiral in marble, glass, and steel created by the previous architectural firm, Gabellini Sheppard. "It's an incredibly elegant piece of sculpture," says Carrier. "Every step is a hand-carved block of marble. Plus it survived the fire."

Warmth returns in unexpected ways. For instance, the designers wrapped the bar in sheet brass and marble, resulting in a room that glows like an ember at the heart of the house, and scattered metallic detailing throughout nearby rooms: The living room coffee table is a gold leaf-filled glass box; crystal and metallic lamps in the media room sparkle when lit; the cluster of dining room candlesticks (among the client's favorite pieces) is a one-of-a-kind 1970s gold and rock crystal sculpture by Claude Boeltz for Cartier that looks as if it was forged in a Middle Earth grotto.

One new space is the roof garden. Carrier describes it as "a little slice of private park in the sky." The designers paid homage to the house's Beaux Arts beginnings by installing a limestone fountain—"a definite nod to the facade," says Carrier. It's an elegant reminder that a house's design need not be uniform to tell a coherent and engaging story. And perhaps that there's room in every tale for a little magic. Says the client, "With the lights twinkling and the ivy, you feel like you've arrived in a fairyland." ♦



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—DESIGNER JESSE CARRIER