

DISCOVERIES



1. THE LIVING ROOM OF A MANHATTAN TOWN HOUSE DISPLAYS ARTWORKS BY (FROM LEFT) SUZANNE JACKSON, ROBERT MOTHERWELL, AND THADDEUS MOSLEY; STOOLS BY ILMARI TAPIOVAARA. 2. ON KAWARA CANVASES IN THE CENTRAL STAIRCASE.



COLLECTING

Breathing Exercise

Updating a historic New York town house, *Andre Mellone* and *Jean-Gabriel Neukomm* give the art ample air to shine

Space changes everything. Depending on the context, a painting or sculpture can assume different personalities, its form redefining a room, its colors shifting in a given light. That process of rediscovery has been a source of joy for two art collectors who recently moved from their longtime apartment on Manhattan's Upper West Side to a historic town house downtown. Living across multiple floors, in discrete yet airy rooms of varying scales, has allowed them to see treasured works with fresh eyes.

The couple didn't set out looking to buy a whole house. During the pandemic, eager for a change of scenery yet reluctant to travel, they opted for an extended staycation, renting a single-family property in the West Village and falling in love with the area,

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1. THE DOUBLE-HEIGHT FAMILY AREA; PAINTING BY MARY HEILMANN. 2. IN THE KITCHEN DINING AREA, PAAVO TYNELL PENDANTS AND A STANLEY WHITNEY PAINTING. 3. THE FORMAL DINING ROOM FEATURES A SAM GILLIAM PAINTING, A INTAGE CARLO SCARPA LIGHT, AND A CUSTOM TABLE.



whose off-grid streets reminded them of Paris. “We weren’t going to move to another city,” says the wife, who recalls thinking, “Why not change up our neighborhood?” When their initial search for a prewar apartment proved fruitless, their real estate agent took them to a 19th-century town house just down the block from their rental. Opposite a park, sun streaming through the windows, the home dispelled any preconceptions of such buildings as dark and cloistered. Thus they officially became West Villagers.

Updating the Italianate structure would require a gut renovation. To help, they enlisted architect Jean-Gabriel Neukomm (no stranger to such transformations) and AD100 designer Andre Mellone, for whom the job marked his first town house project. Any changes would be subject to particular scrutiny given the property’s landmark

status as part of a block-long sweep of historic homes. Innumerable filings later, Neukomm expanded down, digging into the ground to create a proper basement, and up, adding a penthouse office, set back from street view. Rooms are now arranged off a sinuous staircase, with plaster balustrades and an uninterrupted railing of hammered blackened steel that reveal a subtle ovoid profile—a little Giacometti, a little Scarpa.

“We balanced large-scale moves with a spirit of tactility,” reflects Neukomm. Terrazzo flooring likewise reveals a European influence, extending from the entry (framed by a screen of solid glass rods) through the dining and living rooms. Whereas they preserved the brick façade in front, they added soaring window walls to the rear, coaxing light into the double-height family room and adjoining kitchen, its island a marvel in stone.

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DISCOVERIES



“It was a project where every inch made a difference.”
— *Andre Mellone*



1. GAE AULENTI SEATING IN THE GARDEN. 2. A BESPOKE BED ANCHORS THE PRIMARY SUITE. 3. ALSO IN THE COUPLE'S BEDROOM, A PAINTING BY ED CLARK AND A VINTAGE GIANNI MOSCATELLI CHAIR AND OTTOMAN.

Throughout the house, Mellone focused his discerning eye to layer new pieces with some of the couple's existing furnishings. “What I love about Andre is that you can't pin him down to a particular style,” the wife notes of the warm and sophisticated mix. “You have to work that much harder to make it look easy.” For Mellone, the array of rooms became an exercise in composition, scale, and proportions. “A town house, on top of all its romantic ideals, is a difficult design challenge,” he reflects. “Real thinking goes into every piece.”

The driving force at each stage was the art: a sublime but deeply personal trove of contemporary and 20th-century works, with a focus on minimalism, the Arte Povera movement, and canonical female talents. “I needed to know there would be space for the [Robert] Motherwell, the [Stanley] Whitney, the [Lynda] Benglis,” explains the wife. Early design sessions included moving around cutouts of those and other works. The broad Motherwell canvas now surmounts the steel fireplace, opposite which hangs the contorted Benglis sculpture, flanked by Gio Ponti sconces and Jacques Dumond bookcases. All the while, a mix of seating (some new, some existing) mingles with works by Suzanne Jackson, Bridget Riley, and Lee Bontecou. Says Mellone of the collection: “You can see right away there's an emotional and intellectual connection.”

At every turn, designers and clients took care to give works ample room to breathe. “It was a project where every inch made a difference,” Mellone explains of the less-is-more approach, the success of which has reenergized both the couple and the collection. Says the wife: “The art looks so much better than it's ever looked before.” —SAM COCHRAN

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