

GOOD TIDINGS

Finding this West Village brownstone was truly a wonderful thing for one family of five – and so was its imaginative makeover



PHOTOGRAPHY Manolo Yllera
WORDS Emma J Page

LIVING ROOM

'I love the boldness of the Regency mantelpiece against the deeply contemporary Misha Kahn mirror,' says the designer Julie.

Custom small wooden-frame sofas, Jouffre. Mask (on mantelpiece), circa 1960, by Jacques Sagan. Coffee table by Ado Chale. Painting by Friedrich Kunath. 1902 Mosque chair by Carlo Bugatti

LIVING ROOM

A striking artwork by Günther Förg adds a colour pop to this textural scheme. 'I prefer not to design interiors around art,' explains Julie, 'as collectible pieces tend to be moved around by the owners.'

Custom sofa, Julie Hillman Design. Bolotas armchair, Campana Brothers. Coffee table by Wendell Castle. Floor lamp, Afra and Tobia Scarpa. Painting (over sofa) by Günther Förg. Painting (on right) by Josh Smith





KITCHEN

A table made from a Kumbuk log lends an organic feel, neatly offsetting the marble on the wall and on the kitchen island. 'We wanted to add a nook where the family could hang out casually,' says Julie.

Custom **banquette**, Julie Hillman Design. **Wooden dining table**, Tucker Robbins. Vintage **dining chairs** by Pierre Jeanneret; similar, 1stDibs. **Body Buddies breast bowl** (on table), BNEG

Stepping inside this playful, yet glam and art-laden, West Village brownstone you'd never guess the family of five who own it had recently moved from a pre-war apartment on the Upper East Side – an area better known for its elegant, but occasionally prim, approach to interiors. But the family wanted to shake off those constraints and immerse themselves in the energy of downtown NYC. 'Before moving, we found ourselves in the neighbourhood every weekend, enjoying its architecture, shops and restaurants,' says the wife, 'and with one of our children heading to college, it felt like the right time to make a change.'

They unearthed a classic brownstone, prized for the ancient sycamore tree in the backyard and the multiple rear gardens backing onto their own, something known in the city as a 'doughnut effect' because of the resulting verdant views. Architect Steven Harris proved a natural choice to rework the floor plan, as his relationship with the building and its various previous owners spanned a quarter of a century. Interiors specialist Julie Hillman delivered the owners' vision for the 'edgier, contemporary pieces' that set their home apart. 'Usually, I'm the one pushing my clients out of their comfort zone,' she says. 'But this couple were open to anything; they didn't need any convincing. They wanted every piece to be interesting.'

Steven designed a rear addition, extending the kitchen and main bedroom over the garden, under which a basement was carved out for a music room and gym. Unusually, at some point the house had lost its classic front stoop, so the architect played to that change by retaining the entrance at ground level. The south-facing living room on the parlour floor now has something of the air of an Italian piano nobile, with its grand scale. 'The house is tall but not especially deep, so our challenge was creating a sense of generosity,' says Julie. 'The hardest element was getting the dining room right because the staircase leads into the heart of it. So we opted for a flexible set up – easy for dinner parties, but when the table is laden with books, it has the tranquil air of a library.'

Key to the success of these rooms was Julie's insistence on prioritising flow, then adding pieces that differ in aesthetic – a 1902 Mosque chair by Carlo Bugatti paired with a contemporary mirror by Misha Kahn, for example – while conveying a sense of visual harmony. 'I never design around artwork, as I find dedicated collectors always rotate items,' says Julie. 'For me, it's about dynamic pieces that coexist without competing.'

Everything makes a statement, from the kitchen, which is more sculptural than utilitarian, to the life-like bird staring at its own reflection in the entryway mirror. 'They are a perfect reflection of this artsy, musical family,' says Julie. 'Bold and adventurous but also playful and fun – just like their home.'

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juliehillman.com; stevenharrisarchitects.com



ENTRANCE

Dramatic monochrome marble flooring sets the tone in the hallway. 'We wanted to make an impact from the get-go,' says Julie.

Vintage **armchair**, circa 1911, by Hans Günther Reinstein; similar, Pamono. **Artwork** by Michael Krebber. **Flooring**, ProDesign

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THE DESIGNER

Remodelled by architect Steven Harris, this 1830s Greek Revival house was designed by Julie Hillman for a family of five, who moved to NYC's West Village after years of living on the Upper East Side.

THE PROPERTY

In the basement is a music room, office, massage room and gym. On the lower ground is an en-suite guest room, boot room, study and recreation room.

The living room, library/dining room, cloakroom, kitchen and terrace occupy the upper ground; while the first floor has three bedrooms, three bathrooms and a homework room. On the second floor is the main bedroom and bathroom, plus a cloakroom.

The third floor has a sitting room and terrace.

LIBRARY/
DINING ROOM

'This was the hardest space to design as the staircase leads directly into the room,' says Julie. 'The statement table lends a sense of purpose.' She also added pocket doors for flexibility.

Chandelier by Nacho Carbonell. Custom dining table with bronze bases, Eric Schmitt. Vintage dining chairs by Axel Einar Hjorth and Pierre Jeanneret (front left); similar at 1stDibs. Snake sculpture (on wall) by Jennifer Guidi. Painting by John Armleder. Wool and silk rug, Beauvais







RECREATION ROOM

The curved fireplace is complemented by the sinuous, sculptural shape of the coffee tables.

Vintage **lounge chairs**, circa 1940, Fritz Hansen; find similar at 1stDibs. Ceramic **coffee tables** by Agnès Debizet. Cashmere and silk **rug**, Beauvais. **Floor lamp** by Andrea Branzi (2014), Carpenters Workshop Gallery

RECREATION ROOM

Many of the pieces of furniture are like sculptural works of art. 'The owners wanted every piece to be collectible,' says Julie.

Custom **sofa**, Julie Hillman Design. Ceramic **coffee tables** by Agnès Debizet. Vintage Angelo Lelli-style **chandelier**; similar, 1stDibs. **Artwork** by Walead Beshty

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BOOT ROOM

'Though the family are avid collectors, they enjoy playful touches,' says Julie of the reptilian feet of the bench, offset by the dramatically dark Venetian plaster walls.

Bench by Eric Croes



CLOAKROOM

'We chose a delicate white pendant to stand out against the theatricality of the all-black finish,' says Julie.

Pedestal **basin**, Agape. Alabaster **pendant**, Bruno Moinard Éditions. **Mirror**, Lind + Almond

MAIN BEDROOM

With its generous arched windows and a private terrace, this space is a sanctuary at the top of the house. 'We decorated in neutrals but with the punchy addition of the pendant light,' explains Julie.

Custom **bed**, Julie Hillman Design. Zephyr Big Porcelain **chandelier** by Olga Engel at Galerie Armel Soyer. **Wall sconces**, Stilnovo. **Artwork** by Miranda Lichtenstein





MAIN
BATHROOM

'We moved the bathroom to the lower-ceilinged front of the house, under a pitched roof, and clad it in marble for a cocooning effect,' explains Julie.

Mirror, Eileen Gray. **Pendant light,** David Wiseman. **Horsehair stool,** J M Szymanski. **Fittings,** Fantini Rubinetti

THE FAMILY'S OPENNESS TO GOING ALL-OUT WAS EXHILARATING;
IF ANYTHING, THEY CHALLENGED ME - FOR THEM IT WAS
A CASE OF "THE EDGIER THE BETTER"

