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# Metropolitan Home

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*Our cover  
mixes pieces  
from our  
High room  
and our  
Low room.  
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# SoHo Chic

Sophisticated new owners hired designer Laura Kirar to turn their builder's spec loft in downtown *Manhattan* into a user-friendly pied-à-terre with deco-inspired modern furnishings.







#### What the Pros Know

To bring warmth to the plain, dove-master bedroom, Kirar wrapped the space in rich walnut millwork and carried the material through to the custom nightstands and the crib on the custom headboard. This move had the added advantage of increasing storage capacity enough so that a change around chest that jotted into the room is just another painting, which can be seen in the photo at right, marks the spot where the chest once stood could be removed.

After opening up the relatively cramped space and making it feel more luxurious, the owners had advantages of new shelving to exhibit their growing collection of ceramics, and the expanded area also enabled the creation of a comfortable lounge, now outfitted with a custom ceramic ottoman and two lounge chairs. "The millwork makes the room unique and gives it more of a personality," says the happy client. The hand-carved sculpture on the pedestal is by Heidi Spang.



Kirar and her colleague (Richard Frazier, her husband) tackled the unsightly utility wall by paneling it in a "quiet surface," a furniture-grade cerused oak plywood stained a "lovely gray-green tone."

Kirar explains. The open kitchen, which the designer felt countered the sophistication of the main room, was problematic. She and the wife wanted to enclose it, but the husband wasn't sure. "He thought that if we closed it off, the apartment would lose its loft feeling," says the wife, who eventually invoked a "spousal override."

Kirar's solution, however, won over the husband. To "avoid creating another small, heavy space," explains the designer, she devised a "light cube," using translucent resin panels that slide open on two sides, "so the couple has the flexibility to speak to guests while cooking and then to make the mess disappear."

As for art and furnishings, the approach was to "curate a collection," says the wife. The theme? Timeless and organic. "It really was about the forms being natural and soft without being brown and cruddy," observes Kirar. "We were able to invest in some midcentury-modern pieces to complement designs from my Baker collection." The former include a spectacular Paul Frank dining table and, in the master bedroom, two French 1950s armchairs. From Baker came seating, rugs and accessories.

"I'm proud that it's so user-friendly," says the wife. "It's better than my house in the way it works for us." ■  
See Resources, last pages.



PHOTOGRAPHS: This page (from left): Beside a small library in the hallway, Kirar replaced a steel-and-cable banister with a sheet of glass; resin panels from Zions enclose the kitchen, creating what Kirar calls a "light cube." Opposite Kirar sits in the dining area, where Alon Langobsky's salt painting is a dramatic backdrop for a 1950s Paul Frank cork and iron dining table, four vintage Neff Miller rosewood chairs and a pair of these chairs by Kirar for Baker (sculpture by Curtis Dow).

## Developers' spec buildings usually deliver white-box apartments that are little more than blank slates for designers. But because their decisions are based

primarily on bottom-line expediency, developers are less successful at design details, which are often poorly considered and generic. In the case of this 2,700-square-foot 16-level space in SoHo, that meant a standard-issue "industrial" steel-and-cable banister and a cluttered feature wall in the living/dining space.

Said wall, the first sight greeting visitors upon exiting the elevator, was a mess, recalls Laura Kirar, who was hired to redesign the interiors by the unit's first owners, a Connecticut couple with two teenage daughters. "It was littered with doors for a breaker box, trash chute, HVAC system and a closet, as well as the most unattractive gas fireplace I've ever seen," she says.

Despite its flaws, the apartment had a few great selling points, including two large banks of windows (an east-facing bank in the main living area and a west-facing one in the private quarters) with unobstructed views. The western end of the apartment was

divided into two floors, with the kids' area below and the master suite above. "The split level," says the wife, "changes the way it feels. Because the kids can go hang out in their room or watch a movie in the den, it feels more like a house."

Her husband, an IT executive for an investment bank in the city, needed an in-town base during the week. Additionally, the new pied-à-terre serves for family weekend visits to New York and as a place to host the couple's considerable extended family.

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This page: in the living area, designer Laura Kirar concealed a wall of storage and utility spaces behind flush, ceused-oak plywood doors, reducing visual clutter and adding warmth. The sectional is by Douglas Levine for Bright Chair. Opposite, Kirar replaced the mantel with a patinated bronze surround, then blended clean-lined furnishings with organic forms like the teak-root coffee table from Chista. The leather Mj lounge chair and lattice carpet are Kirar designs for Baker.

