



Three separate apartments inside a New York town house become a cohesive and stunning whole thanks to Marc Tsurumaki and Jeff Lincoln

text: *marc kristal* **a house united**





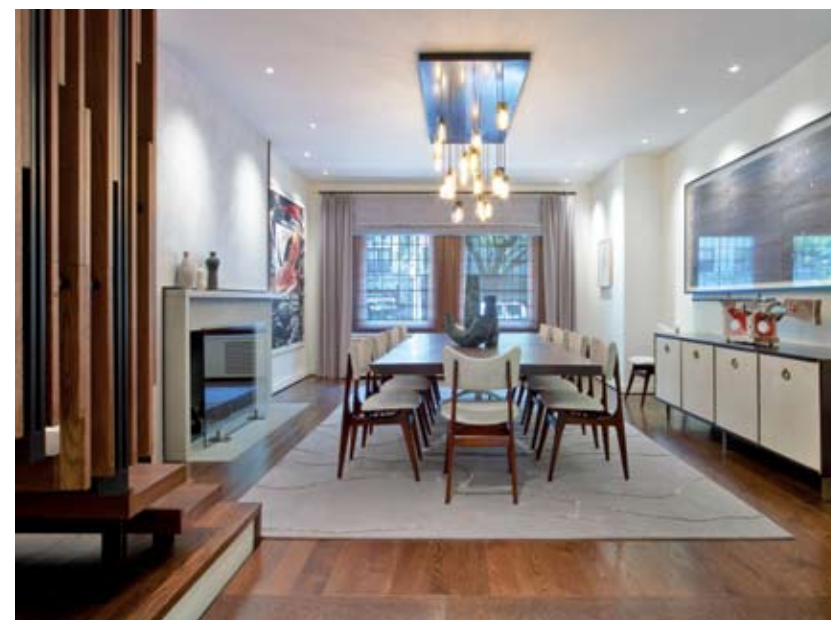
The town houses that bring a stateliness to many New York streets are, as the song goes, practiced at the art of deception. Outwardly they convey the privileged domesticity of the 19th-century single-family residence. But behind the facades typically lurks a different reality: confining, nondescript apartments, carved out with brute idiosyncrasy. It's a dichotomy that is especially startling in the city's exclusive uptown environs, where one assumes the good life

still prevails—and where, in the course of two renovations over eight years, the very downtown firm Lewis.Tsurumaki.Lewis combined three town-house apartments into a 21st-century version of old-world grandeur.

The four-story-plus-garden-level residence had been divided into apartments of different sizes and configurations. But there was a further twist: Floor levels in the front of the building did not align with those in the back. Spaces behind the street facade retained the high ceilings and grand proportions of the original architecture; those behind the garden facade had lower ceilings because an extra floor had been sandwiched in. Marc Tsurumaki, who led the project, speculates that when the house was converted, the developers gutted the rear portion and reconstructed it with compressed ceiling heights to gain the additional, squeezed-in story.

The misalignment didn't affect the initial renovation, which was confined to the town house's rear. LTL's client, who owned a small one-bedroom duplex spanning the garden and first floors, purchased a second-floor studio directly above. He engaged the firm to refashion it into a master suite and connect it to the redesigned living/kitchen and guest-room/office levels below. Tsurumaki accomplished this with a spiral staircase that forms the renovation's most distinctive element. Enclosed in a cylindrical blackened-steel screen featuring a laser-cut pattern, the stair expresses the hermetic, inward-looking quality of the small, stacked spaces.

Despite the expansion, the triplex still lacked substantial public living areas. ➤



**Previous spread:** A screen of slatted oak and blackened steel borders the new staircase in a New York town house by Lewis.Tsurumaki.Lewis and Jeff Lincoln Interiors. Photography: Michael Moran/Otto.

**Opposite top:** A chair by Vladimir Kagan and two by T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings stand near a Paul Evans cabinet in the living room; photography: Michael Moran/Otto. **Opposite bottom:** The flooring throughout and the stair treads are stained oak; photography: Eric Laignel.

**Top:** The dining room pairs John Pomp's pendant fixture with a table by Tyler Hays and Italian 1950's chairs. **Bottom:** What had been a small guest bedroom on the living room's mezzanine is now a snug library furnished with a vintage Arne Jacobsen chair, a cowhide-and-bronze bench, a sofa upholstered in cotton chenille, and a Douglas Gordon photograph. Photography: Eric Laignel.



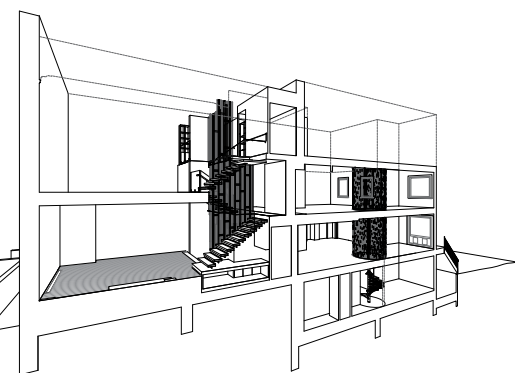


So, when the adjacent street-front duplex became available, LTL's client purchased it. Given their capacious original proportions, the one-bedroom duplex's two main spaces would serve as the combined apartment's grand living and dining rooms, while the intimately scaled triplex would contain the bedrooms and informal social areas. The front/rear misalignment, however, produced a daunting challenge: With a triplex in back and a duplex-plus-mezzanine in front, Tsurumaki was faced with combining six different levels, spread over 3,250 square feet, into a coherent home. "Visually and spatially, how do we make it continuous instead of compartmentalized?" Tsurumaki recalls wondering.

His solution amounted to a bravura example of *vive la différence*: He excavated a gap, measuring nearly 4 feet wide and rising up 27 feet, between the front and rear apartments, thereby exposing five of the six floors to one another (the garden level remains out of view). "By revealing the condition, we created a ricochet of relationships between the different levels of the apartment, the public and the private," the architect continues. "It was important that you could stand in the middle and see from the street to the garden."

The apartments were sutured back together with an equally dramatic gesture: A grand public stair, partially enclosed by a slatted-oak-and-blackened-steel screen, cascades down the five levels like a waterfall; it not only joins the floors but also facilitates ever-changing views as one moves up and down. Because the stair is both cantilevered and hung from the ceiling, it looks surprisingly weightless, a sensation intensified by the landings, which seem to float between the floor levels. The structure also helps unify the street and garden sides aesthetically: The screen plays off the pattern of the spiral stair's enclosure, converting its tight perforations into a more flowing visual composition.

"The architecture, interiors, and client's art collection were all to mesh well together," explains interior designer Jeff Lincoln, who developed the project's decorative scheme. This proved a tricky balance. The owner requested ➤



**Left:** The stair and screen unite five disparate levels in what had been three separate apartments. The photograph in the living room is by James Casebere. Photography: Michael Moran/Otto.

**Opposite top, from left:** Under a custom parchment pendant fixture, a desk and credenza by Hays flank the office, which shares a party wall with the Whitney Museum of American Art. Part of the first of the town house's two renovations, a spiral stair, enclosed by a screen of laser-cut blackened steel, connects the three garden-facing levels. **Opposite bottom, from left:** The powder room has marble floor tile and two works on paper by Marcel Dzama. Mimmo Rotella's paper collage on canvas hangs on the wall on the landing between the living and dining rooms. Photography: Eric Laignel.





contemporary spaces, accented by mid century–modern furnishings, as a counterpoint to the building’s traditional profile. Yet Lincoln wanted to avoid an excess of the usual vintage-collectible suspects that he believed would feel neither less traditional nor more connected to the client’s “aggressively contemporary” art collection, which includes works by Tom Sachs, Catherine Opie, and Vik Muniz.

Accordingly, the Jeff Lincoln Interiors principal introduced contemporary and custom pieces into the mix and, where possible, updated the classics, as with the metallic-silver leather upholstery on a pair of vintage T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings chairs—“that little kick makes the old pieces feel more spirited and forms a bridge to the art,” he says. For one of the custom rugs, “I channeled Piet Mondrian,” he continues. Elsewhere, a chandelier is Alexander Calderesque. Above all, the designer deferred to the architecture and selected the objects in collaboration with his client, so that “the apartment reflects who he is, not the hand of the designer.”

Ultimately, states Tsurumaki, “It was the idiosyncrasies that fascinated us,” referring to the town house in particular as well as the unknowable historical processes in cities in general. 🏡

PROJECT TEAM

PAUL LEWIS; DAVID J. LEWIS; LUCAS CASCARDO; JOHN MORRISON; MIA LORENZETTI LEE; DERIC MIZOKAMI; MATTHEW ROMAN; KATE SNIDER; LEWIS.TSURUMAKI.LEWIS. KATIE PEYTON; ASHLEY DARRYL; JEFF LINCOLN INTERIORS. LUMEN ARCHITECTURE: LIGHTING CONSULTANT. ROBERT SILMAN ASSOCIATES: STRUCTURAL ENGINEER. D'ANTONIO CONSULTING ENGINEERS: MEP. J & J JOHNSON CO.: GENERAL CONTRACTOR.

PRODUCT SOURCES

FROM FRONT THROUGH TODD MERRILL ANTIQUES: CABINET (LIVING ROOM). THROUGH RALPH PUCCI INTERNATIONAL: PENDANT FIXTURE, CLUB CHAIR, SOFA (LIVING ROOM), LAMP (OFFICE), BROWN-SHADE LAMP (DEN). MAHARAM: CLUB CHAIR FABRIC, SOFA FABRIC (LIVING ROOM). ERIC APPEL: CHAIRS. EDELMAN LEATHER: CHAIR UPHOLSTERY. CHRISTIAN LIAIGRE THROUGH HOLLY HUNT: COCKTAIL TABLES, CUSTOM RUG. JOHN POMP STUDIOS: CUSTOM PENDANT FIXTURE (DINING ROOM). THROUGH VAN DEN AKKER ANTIQUES: CHAIRS. ROMAN THOMAS: CUSTOM CREDENZA. POLLACK: SHADE FABRIC. ROGERS & GOFFIGON: CURTAIN FABRIC (DINING ROOM, DEN). BDDW: CUSTOM TABLE, RUG (DINING ROOM), DESK, CREDENZA (OFFICE), COFFEE TABLE (DEN). JOHN BOONE: CUSTOM BENCH (LIBRARY). EDELMAN LEATHER: UPHOLSTERY. THROUGH ABINGDON 12: CHAIR. BRUNSCHWIG & FILS: SOFA FABRIC. EDWARD FIELDS CARPET MAKERS: CUSTOM RUG. THROUGH GASPAR ASARO-MILLENOVECENTO: CHAIR (OFFICE). JOHN WIGMORE: CUSTOM PENDANT FIXTURE. LACAVA: SINK (POWDER ROOM). VOLA: SINK FITTINGS. DURAVIT: TOILET. STONE SOURCE: FLOOR TILE. THROUGH HOLLY HUNT: BED (BEDROOM), SOFA (DEN). FRETTE: BEDDING (BEDROOM). CARINI LANG: CUSTOM RUG (DEN). THROUGH WYETH: ARMCHAIR. COMERFORD COLLECTION: WHITE-SHADE LAMP. THROUGHOUT VEYKO: SPIRAL STAIR, SCREEN. KENNETH WIDENER DECORATIVE PAINTING: CUSTOM WALL FINISHES. BENJAMIN MOORE & CO.: PAINT. LUCIFER LIGHTING COMPANY: RECESSED CEILING FIXTURES.

**Top:** The top of the spiral staircase ends at the master suite, which has a bed by Christian Liaigre. **Bottom:** The spiral connects three floors of the original triplex. Photography: Eric Laignel. **Opposite top:** In the den, a Hans Wegner chair is across from a table by Hays and a sofa by Liaigre; photography: Eric Laignel. **Opposite bottom:** The kitchen, with a maple canopy, stands between the den and the dining room; photography: Michael Moran/Otto.

