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In the entrance area of a New York loft renovated and decorated by David Kleinberg, a root bowl from Amy Perlin Antiques is displayed below a bronze balustrade by David Kleinberg Design Assoc. with Bill Sullivan. Facing page: The living room's fireplace and wenge-paneled wall were custom made by David Kleinberg Design Assoc.; the vintage low chairs are from Amy Perlin Antiques, and the cotton-and-sisal rug is by Patterson, Flynn & Martin. See Resources.



## POLISHED PERFORMANCE

INTERIOR DESIGNER DAVID KLEINBERG RECASTS A MINIMALIST MANHATTAN LOFT INTO A LUXURIOUS PIED-À-TERRE FOR A FILM DIRECTOR AND HIS YOUNG FAMILY

TEXT BY SHAX RIEGLER · PHOTOGRAPHY BY PIETER ESTERSOHN · STYLED BY LILI ABIR REGEN

Orson Welles once said, "A film is never really good unless the camera is an eye in the head of a poet." Decorating requires its practitioners to think just as lyrically as they conjure emotions and associations out of thin air and channel them into three-dimensional settings. It's a sentiment boldly fulfilled by David Kleinberg when he was enlisted by a top Hollywood director to create a family home "from scratch, from absolute empty," he says.

The space the director and his wife handed over was a large but banal duplex loft in a 19th-century building in Tribeca, Kleinberg notes, "chopped arbitrarily into rooms and fitted with stock materials and standard hardware." He had to make it warm and inviting, though it is not the family's main residence. "It's almost a reverse weekend house," the designer explains, "because they live in a very rural environment full-time. So they definitely wanted this place to feel like Manhattan."

Besides that directive and a request for a couple of knock-your-socks-off details, the clients pretty much got out of the way so Kleinberg and his team could gut the place and work their magic. One of the first decisions was to build an imposing fireplace near the entrance to the apartment in lieu of one that was little more than a black hole in an expanse of white wall. Kleinberg installed a monumental construction inspired by Paul Dupré-Lafon, a 1940s French interior architect and Hermès product designer. The backlit monolith of contrasting polished and chiseled limestone sparkling with inlaid bronze seems to float against a field of wenge paneling. (One wow moment down.)

While the fireplace makes an immediate impact on visitors, close by is another breathtaking gesture: an open staircase composed of a cascade of cantilevered limestone blocks nestled into a two-story wall paneled with satiny wenge. Its sinuous



The upstairs family room features custom-made sofas upholstered in a Larsen fabric; the Kleinberg-designed rug is by Patterson, Flynn & Martin. Facing page, from top: Custom-made club chairs by Anthony Lawrence-Belfair in the downstairs family room. In the same space is a vintage center table from Miguel Saco Furniture; the 1950s cabinet and vintage Jacob Kjaer chairs are from Antik. See Resources.







cast-bronze balustrade, conceived by Kleinberg's team and artist Bill Sullivan, depicts twining branches, pinecones, and seedpods. "I wanted it to be very organic to balance the rectilinear quality of the rest of the space," Kleinberg says. "We looked at ironwork by the early-20th-century French designer Edgar Brandt and came up with this naturalistic fantasy that seems to grow out of the steps. I think it's wildly successful."

To add a touch of the grittier New York sensibility the clients desired, Kleinberg installed the kind of cast-iron columns one expects to find in a downtown loft. "The developer had replaced the originals with spindly things, and when you realized they weren't cast iron, you felt cheated," the designer explains. "So we ended up getting antique columns from a salvage company down South. They had been stripped, so we actually had to age them, but the space sort of demanded their presence."

As for the furnishings, the focus was on a subtle layering of warm colors and enticing textures. "The clients didn't want it to feel like an art gallery, which so many lofts do," Kleinberg says. As a result, nothing here is stark or hard. Instead the decoration is a sometimes surprising mix of midcentury-modern clarity and country-house eclecticism united by luxe materials and an understated palette. In the upstairs family room, a marquetry screen à la Jean-Michel Frank stands alongside a quartet of '30s-style chairs gathered around, in Kleinberg's words, "the sort of shapely sofas you'd expect to see in an English drawing room." An Indian inlaid table and an overscale suede ottoman complete the intimate group. "When it came to furniture, we didn't want it to be too modern," the designer says. "I veered away from the kind of low-slung, square things you would expect."

Perfect lighting was another part of the equation. Though lofts may have a reputation for being

bright and sunny, they actually present a challenge. "You're always trying to fight against the dark center of the space, because the windows are way at the front or back," Kleinberg says. Lighting expert Bill Schwinghammer came up with a solution in which the entire system—general illumination as well as pinpoints for tasks—is concealed discreetly behind frosted-glass ceiling panels. "It was the only way to avoid having 2,000 spotlights," asserts Kleinberg, who installed a skylight above the staircase for additional glow.

The loft's transformation is so sensitive that it's hard to imagine it looking any other way. "The goal was to give this place a sense of permanence," Kleinberg says. "The first thing the wife did when they moved in was to organize the kitchen and fill the cabinets with food. Some people would put their clothes away—she stocked the kitchen. That's when I knew they were in it for the long haul." ■

In the master bedroom, a vintage French armchair from Maison Gerard and a limestone-and-bronze fireplace; the bed by David Kleinberg Design Assoc. is upholstered in a Nancy Corzine fabric. Facing page, clockwise from top left: The master bath features bleached-anigre cabinetry. Glass tiles from Walker Zanger surround a custom-made wenge vanity with a Vitraform sink and Waterworks fittings in the powder room. The walls of the guest room are covered in a Rubelli linen from Bergamo Fabrics; the bed is by David Kleinberg Design Assoc., the klismos chair is vintage, the desk is 1960s, and the rug is by Patterson, Flynn & Martin. See Resources.