

In the parlor of Rachel Lee and Ara Hovnanian's Italianate townhouse in the West Village, which was renovated by the Dutch designer Piet Boon and architect William O'Neill, the sofa is from the Future Perfect, the leather swivel chairs are by B&B Italia, and the rug is by Madeline Weinrib; Boon designed the chandelier, the marble mantel is original, and the oak flooring is by Walking on Wood. **OPPOSITE:** Rachel Lee Hovnanian in her master bedroom, with her painting *Johnny Walker Come to Visit*. For details, see Resources.



Clean Sweep

Artist Rachel Lee Hovnanian teams with designer Piet Boon to craft a contemporary take on grandeur within her family's historic Greenwich Village townhouse. The result: an unexpected yet serene sanctuary

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Rachel Lee and Ara Hovnanian's meticulously renovated townhouse in Manhattan's West Village looks effortless, but the magic did not happen overnight. When the couple set out to transform the building, embracing and restoring the heritage of the landmarked Italianate gem while creating an exquisitely spare and strikingly pale interior, they had no idea the transformation would end up taking three full years.

Granted, the couple—who have been married for three decades and have two children—had been down this road before. But the biggest apartment overhaul they had previously undertaken lasted a mere four months.

It wasn't that they needed a project to occupy their time. Indeed, both have their hands full with their careers: As president and CEO of Hovnanian Enterprises, Ara runs one of the largest home builders in the nation, while his wife works out of a light-filled studio in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood, making the sculptures and installations that have earned her an international following. When they first saw this townhouse, the family was living in a perfectly handsome brownstone elsewhere in the Village. "The house was great, but it had been designed by someone else, which never felt right to us," says Rachel.

They found themselves drawn just a few blocks west to an 1860s brick rowhouse loaded with the kind of rare architectural details that seldom survive changes in ownership. "We were smitten with the elaborate rope molding, casings, and over-the-top ceiling medallions," she says.

As dazzled as they were, the couple couldn't help but shift things around a bit. "Ara is very spatially savvy," says Rachel, "and he knew exactly what to do to open up the rooms without compromising the architecture."

They were also smart enough to enlist the Dutch interior and furniture designer Piet Boon, who is known for his modernist yet playful aesthetic. Boon helped to remodel the townhouse into a home that feels intimate enough for family life yet sufficiently grand for entertaining in style. "Rachel and Ara really wanted to play with contrasts, which turned out to be great fun," Boon says. "We managed to do that through the furniture selection, bespoke millwork, color scheme, material combinations, and, of course, their beautiful art collection."

To bring additional light into the foyer, Boon enlarged the entry to the living room on the parlor floor. An earlier addition at the back of the garden floor was raised up to the roof, where it is now encased in glass and flanked by outdoor decks, one of which





In the living room, the original marble mantel is flanked by a pair of Flexform chaises, the ottoman is by Piet Boon, and the Mongolian lamb-covered chairs are by Paola Navone for Baxter; the bronze side tables are by Rick Owens, the custom rugs are by Madeline Weinrib, and the artworks on either side of the fireplace are by Hovnanian, from her "Mirror Motherboard" series. For details, see Resources.



The dining room has a custom table, chairs by Piet Boon, and Arteriors chandeliers; the flooring is by CCS Stone, and the artwork, *Fractile Inter II*, is by Hovnanian. **OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** The kitchen range is by BlueStar, and the cabinetry and countertops are by Minimal USA; folding doors by Durango Doors lead to a glassed-in seating area. New door casings by Palladio Mouldings were matched to existing plasterwork throughout; the stair's original wooden railing was painted in Fine Paints of Europe's Hollandlac Satin in White. On the rooftop patio, a sofa by David Sutherland for Restoration Hardware is covered in a Perennials fabric, the chairs and side table are by Paola Lenti, and the cocktail table is a custom design. For details, see Resources.



In the master bedroom, the bed is dressed in linens from E. Braun & Co., the chair and side table are by B&B Italia, and the chandelier is by Brand van Egmond. **OPPOSITE:** The Carrara marble tub in the master bath was custom made in Italy, and the chandelier is by Brand van Egmond; the hallway walls are painted White and the ceiling Super White, both by Benjamin Moore. For details, see Resources.



is equipped with a steel-encased hot tub with a view of the Empire State Building. Spending time outdoors was a priority. "Light is really important to both of us," Rachel notes, "so much so that we installed radiant heaters in the garden so that we could eat outside through the spring and fall."

With Boon's blessing, the couple were heavily involved in achieving their vision. They devoted countless weekends to the search for the perfect materials, fixtures, and furnishings and traveled to Carrara, Italy, to personally select the marbles for the kitchen's counters and master bath's tub.

Their hands-on approach also extended to the design of the interiors. "It was important to me that each room have a place for conversation," Rachel says. She credits the use of painter's tape as the key to getting the layout of each space exactly right. "I had a roll in my bag at all times during the renovation," she says. "Before we put a single piece of furniture in the house, we taped

off the exact dimensions of chairs, sofas, and tables. We even laid out the shape of fixed pieces, like the tub, toilet, and vanity, and walked around them to be sure the size and scale worked."

The end result is harmonious and serene. Stress seems to magically evaporate once one passes through the front door. "When you step off the streets of New York and into the house," Boon observes, "there is a dramatic shift in energy."

Rachel points to the rooftop as a perfect execution of that idea. Whether relaxing under the stars in the hot tub or hosting friends in the glassed-in patio, she is surrounded by, but not in thrall to, the buzz of the city. It is a deceptively difficult mood to achieve, but this, after all, is an artist whose practice includes the meditative act of stringing hundreds of narcissus petals into blooms and fastening them to outside canvases. "The roof is where our home's positive energy begins," she says, "and it flows throughout this remarkable jewel of a house." ■