

A photograph of a modern interior space. On the left, a large, dark, fluted column stands vertically. The floor is a light, reflective material. In the center, a large white modular sofa is positioned. To the right, a person in dark clothing is walking towards the right side of the frame. In the foreground, a dark, rectangular table is partially visible. The background features large windows that look out onto a cityscape. The text 'banker's trust' is overlaid on the left side of the image, with 'banker's' in black and 'trust' in red.

banker's trust

text by

JOSEPH GIOVANNINI

photography by

WILLIAM WALDRON

produced by

ELIZABETH SVERBEYEFF BYRON

The worlds of high finance and architecture meet in a striking collaboration

In her Tribeca loft, Roberta Arena (right, with Gus) converses with architect Katherine Chia, who designed the space with her partner, Arjun Desai. The daybed is a Mies van der Rohe reproduction; the Cappellini sofa and chairs are from Modern Age. See Resources.



This page:

Arena in the library. Chia and Desai also designed the bookshelves.

Facing page,

top: The screen's acid-etched panels shield the dining room from the entryway.

Bottom:

Dunbar-style chairs and a concrete table in the main room. See Resources.

“Roberta is the first client who allowed us to take design to a very pure level”



Maybe Roberta Arena is decisive because she was executive vice president of one of the nation's largest banking firms, or perhaps she became executive vice president because she's decisive. Either way, she knew what she wanted when she first saw her new Tribeca loft: simplicity pushed to the vanishing point—a.k.a. minimalism.

“I don't wear jewelry, and I've never liked bows and floral prints,” says the recently retired Arena, whose closetful of buttonless, zipperless neutral-gray creations by Zoran, the no-frills fashion designer, reveals all about her personal aesthetics. “Buttons drive me crazy,” she says. “I've always liked simple. It's easy. It clears your thoughts.”

Arena came to the loft with such a clear mind and little baggage because her 20-year tenure as a banking nomad—posted in London, Paris, Los Angeles, Brussels, Miami, and Chicago—kept her moving frequently and traveling light. Even when she returned to New York, in 1994, she lived out of a suitcase more than half the year (in 1996, she clocked 30 weekends out of town). She even refrained from buying books—her passion—for lack of a wall she could call her own. “I winnowed down my possessions to a few things I treasure,” she says.

Call it a reverse midlife crisis, but having left so many places, she wanted to park her toothbrush permanently. Her Realtor found a loft that satisfied her checklist—plenty of light, a big square living space rather than the typical long narrow one, and a sweeping vista. The 5,000-square-foot floor was bounded on three sides by a colonnade of generous windows; fluted cast-iron columns supported 10½-foot-high ceilings. Because Arena “needed to feel comfortable alone yet be able to have eight or ten people over,” the space had to be “fungible.” To make the least out of the raw emptiness, she hired New York architects Katherine Chia and Arjun Desai.

“We decided to define areas, not with solid walls and doors but with a series of spatial spheres,” says Chia. The architects zoned the full-floor loft for public spaces up front and private areas in back, and sized them so they

wouldn't overwhelm their client. They also studied Japanese garden design in addition to light sculpture by James Turrell and art furniture by Donald Judd. "We tried to create simple, functional flowing areas, paying special attention to light," says Desai. "It was a process of reduction and clarification."

"Roberta is the first client who allowed us to take design to a very pure level," adds Chia. "We thought about what it means for the typical New Yorker to live sandwiched between the floor and ceiling planes, so we made cuts in the ceiling and folded its surfaces for hidden lights that give it a sense of floating." In the living room, the architects hollowed out a large wedge in the ceiling and added concealed lighting that defines a virtual room within the larger room, essentially nesting a void in a vacuum. To achieve final simplicity—that ne plus ultra minimalism beyond which the design could not be—they banished all the thermostats, track lights, and door handles that foster visual static. "Keeping the ceiling and walls clean was a major consideration," Arena says. "Among my least favorite things are plugs and switches. Things like doors get in my way. I wanted open closets without doors; I hate to root around."

The palette of materials reinforces the loft's serenity. In the entry, two floor-to-ceiling backlit planes of translucent white glass immediately tranquilize jumpy New Yorkers just off the elevator (some instinctively remove their shoes, as if they were entering a Japanese house). The floor was stained a greenish gray by Arena's sister, Désirée, who helped consult on colors. The stainless-steel bathroom sink was sandblasted and acid-etched to create a diffuse reflection. Neutral grays are integrated into concrete walls and floors in the bathroom and kitchen, and a massive concrete table, not about to go anywhere soon, separates the kitchen and living areas. Billowy white sofas by Cappellini—architectural in their scale and shape, and large enough to be daybeds—help create a "room" within the living room already suggested by the luminous light wedge sculpted into the ceiling.

"The design is minimal but not industrial," says Arena, admiring the neat squares of light striking the expansive living room's bare gray hardwood floors. "Most people say it's calm without being cold. In a city like New York, that's a net take-away." ★

"I've always liked simple. It's easy. It clears your thoughts"





Facing page, top: Arena's open dressing area.

Bottom: The bathroom walls and floor are concrete; the stainless-steel sink was custom made.

This page: A Zoran stole is draped across the Cappellini bed. See Resources.

resources

Items pictured but not listed are from private collections.

TREND ALERT

Page 52: Maintenance border, #24104-29, to the trade from *First Editions* (for showrooms: 212-355-1150). **Somerset border**, #HCY43800, to the trade from *Hinson & Company* (for showrooms: 212-475-4100). **Consul border**, #B592/01, to the trade from *Osborne & Little* (for showrooms: 212-751-3333). **Sea Island border**, #59129-06/059, designed by *Chuck Fischer*, to the trade from *Brunschwig & Fils* (for showrooms: 212-838-7878). **Bernadotte border**, #B593/05, to the trade from *Osborne & Little*. **Mediterranean border**, #564112, \$25 per 4½ yd. roll, by *Waverly* (for stores: 800-423-5881). **Roman Clef border**, #YBL103, by *Zoffany*, to the trade from *Whittaker & Woods* (for showrooms: 800-395-8760). **Bead and Reed border**, #14490-06; **Corbel Cornice border**, #14517-06; to the trade from *Brunschwig & Fils*. **Consul border**, #B592/08, to the trade from *Osborne & Little*. **Page 54: Treillage Jardin border**, #517590, to the trade from *Schumacher* (for showrooms: 800-332-3384). **Fougerolle border**, #8101-02, to the trade from *Manuel Canovas* (for showrooms: 212-752-9588). **Secret Garden border**, #B852/03, to the trade from *Osborne & Little* (for showrooms: 212-751-3333). **Li-T'ang border**, #P224/06, by *Designers Guild*, to the trade from *Osborne & Little*. **Lacquer Wood border**, #522583, to the trade from *Schumacher*. **Fret border**, #15985-06, to the trade from *Brunschwig & Fils* (for showrooms: 212-838-7878). **New Grantley border**, #JY39B-03, by *Jane Churchill*, to the trade from *Coutant & Tout* (for showrooms: 212-647-6900). **Cahir Border Trim**, #14394-06, to the trade from *Brunschwig & Fils*. **Andria Gimp border**, #520824; **Hanover border**, #521841; to the trade from *Schumacher*.

DANIEL'S DISH

Page 58: All-cotton Fine Mesh cheesecloth, #854679, \$3.50; **Quick Prep Vari-Speed hand blender**, #678631, \$50, by *Cuisinart*; **Lever-pull corkscrew**, #306993, \$139, by *Screwpull*; **ACEA stainless-steel vegetable food mill**, #841494, \$24; from *Williams-Sonoma* (for information: 800-541-1262). **Château Laguiole tire-bouchon**, \$115-\$135, from *Rosenthal Wine Merchant* (318 E. 84th St., New York, NY 10028; 212-249-6650).

ARTISANS

Page 72: Metalwork by *York Ast* (for information: 212-674-4085).

WHAT'S IN STORE

Page 74: Furniture and accessories from *Marc J. Matz* (366½ Broadway, Cambridge, MA 12139; 617-661-6200).

COLLECTORS

Pages 76-80: Marjorie Reed Gordon, Private Dealer (212-535-6280).

DECOROSCOPE

Page 88: David Kleinberg of *David Kleinberg Design Associates* (150 E. 74th St., Suite 2E, New York, NY 10021; 212-585-2500).

HUDSON HAWK

Pages 170-77: Artwork by *Frank Faulkner*, represented by *Robert McClain & Co.* (2818 Kirby

Dr., Houston, TX 77098; 713-520-9988).

Page 171: Piranesi etchings from *Niall Smith Antiques* (344 Bleecker St., New York, NY 10014; 212-255-0660; and 96 Grand St., New York, NY 10013; 212-941-7354). **Regency-style armchairs** from the *Hudson Antiques Center* (536 Warren St., Hudson, NY 12534; 518-828-9920). **Pages 172-73: Regency-style armchairs and cocktail table** from *Niall Smith Antiques*. **Temple lamp** from *Coconut Company* (131 Greene St., New York, NY 10012; 212-539-1940). **Pages 174-75: White linen bedding** from *Chambers* (to order: 800-334-9790). **Paper umbrella** from *Pearl River Mart* (277 Canal St., New York, NY 10013; 212-431-4770). **Side chairs** from *Noonan Antiques* (551 Warren St., Hudson, NY 12534; 518-828-5779). **Pages 176-77: Alabaster urn, painted paper screen, and antique toile de Jouy** from *Niall Smith Antiques*. **Nineteenth-century French sieve** from *Howard Kaplan Antiques* (827 Broadway, New York, NY 10003; 212-674-1000). **Anubis paint**, #2306, by *Pratt & Lambert Paints* (for stores: 800-289-7728).

JOINT VENTURE

Page 178: Oil on paper painting by *James Brown* from *Alan Moss* (436 Lafayette St., New York, NY 10003; 212-473-1310). **Plaster table lamps** by *Philippe Anthonioz* from *Aero* (132 Spring St., New York, NY 10012; 212-966-1500). **Pages 180-81: Yorkshire love seats** from the *Ralph Lauren Home Collection* (for stores: 212-642-8700). **Nineteenth-century mirror** from *James Hepner Antiques* (130 E. 82nd St., New York, NY 10028; 212-737-4470). **Vintage tabouret** by *André Arbus* from *Barry Friedman Ltd.* (32 E. 67th St., New York, NY 10021; 212-794-8950). **Oak maquette and oak Nagato table** by *Christian Liaigre pour Holly Hunt*, to the trade from *Holly Hunt New York* (979 Third Ave., Suite 605, New York, NY 10022; 212-755-6555) and the *Holly Hunt Collection* (1844 Merchandise Mart, Chicago, IL 60654; 312-644-1844). **Vintage sycamore chairs** by *Jean-Michel Frank* from *Hemisphere* (173 Fulham Rd., London, England SW3 6JW; 011-44-1-71-581-9800). **Plaster vase** by *Olivier Gagnère* and **table lamp** by *Garouste and Bonetti* from *Neotu* (409 W. 44th St., New York, NY 10036; 212-262-9250). **Page 182: Paper sconces** by *Garouste and Bonetti* from *Neotu* (25 rue du Renard, Paris, France 75004; 011-331-42-78-96-97). **Oak trestle table** by *Christian Liaigre pour Holly Hunt*, to the trade from *Holly Hunt*. **Pages 184-5: Vintage upholstered Jean Royère bench** from *Forty One* (41 Wooster St., New York, NY 10013; 212-343-0935). **Vintage upholstered aluminum armchairs** by *Warren McArthur* from *Lost City Arts* (275 Lafayette St., New York, NY 10012; 212-941-8025). **Platinum print** by *Horst* from *Staley-Wise Gallery* (560 Broadway, New York, NY 10012; 212-966-6223). **Vintage desk lamp** by *Edouard Buquet* from *Barry Friedman Ltd.*

COSMIC THING

Pages 186-91: Garden design and consultation by *Dean Riddle* (914-688-7048). **Design and construction** by *William Johnson* (914-883-7792).

BANKER'S TRUST

Pages 200-205: Architecture and design by *Desai/Chia Studio* (222 Park Ave. South, #6C, New York, NY 10003; 212-228-1222). **Design and color consultation** by *Désirée Arena* (914-657-3388). **Lighting design** by *Thomas Thompson Lighting Design* (31 W. 21st St., New York, NY 10010; 212-366-1760). **Pages 200-201: Sofa and chair** by *Cappellini* from *Modern Age* (102 Wooster St., New York, NY 10012; 212-966-0669). **Antique throw rug** from *Velsani Antiques* (334 Wall St., Kingston, NY 12401; 914-340-0409). **Table of cast artisan-plaster medium**, designed by *Desai/Chia Studio*, made by *Art in Construction, Ltd.* (34 W. 22nd St., 6th fl., New York, NY 10010; 212-352-3019). **Pages 202-203: Bookshelves** designed by *Desai/Chia Studio*. **Sofa and ottoman** by *Cappellini* from *Modern Age*. **Acid-etched acrylic screen** from *Velsani Antiques*. **Pages 204-205: Bathroom walls, floor, and shower** of cast artisan-plaster medium, by *Art in Construction, Ltd.* **Stainless-steel sink** by *Mison Concepts* (121 E. Second St., Mineola, NY 11501; 516-739-0040). **Bed and table** by *Cappellini* from *Modern Age*.

CHESSY'S CHOICE

Pages 206-207: White wicker chair, to the trade from *Bielecky Brothers, Inc.* (979 Third Ave., Suite 842, New York, NY 10022; 212-753-2355). **Page 209: Sling chairs** by *MAC II* (125 E. 81st St., New York, NY 10028; 212-249-4466). **Pages 210-11: Photographs** from *Mark Shilen Gallery* (109 Greene St., New York, NY 10012; 212-925-3394). **Anglo-Indian armchairs and hat rack** from *Harrington Antiques* (for information: 516-728-0449). **Pages 212-13: Portuguese towel armoire** from *Harrington Antiques*. **Vintage rattan table**, to the trade from *J. Garvin Mecking, Inc.* (72 E. 11th St., New York, NY 10003; 212-677-4316).

THE 10 COOLEST UMBRELLAS

Pages 214-19: Paula Perlini of *Paula Perlini Inc.* (163 E. 35th St., New York, NY 10016; 212-889-6551). **David Kleinberg** of *David Kleinberg Design Associates* (150 E. 74th St., Suite 2E, New York, NY 10021; 212-585-2500). **The Lighthouse Collection Umbrella**, \$1,780 (also in other sizes, shapes, fabrics, and woods); **steel base**, \$340; by *Santa Barbara Designs*, to the trade from *DelGreco Company* (for information: 212-688-5310). For other sources, call *Santa Barbara Designs* (805-683-9464). **Market Umbrella**, #17-1317874, \$99, in white or blue canvas; **iron base**, #17-1050772, \$49; from *Pottery Barn* (to order: 800-922-5507). **Balance Umbrella**, #TBU-9, in natural or navy Sunbrella fabric, \$1,025 (also in 11' dia.); **steel base**, #UB-1, \$236; from *Janus et Cie* (to order: 800-24JANUS). **Riviera Teak Umbrella**, in green or white Sunbrella canvas, \$725 (also in 8'2" dia.); **steel base**, \$195; from *Smith & Hawken* (for stores or to order: 800-776-3336). **Bamboo Umbrella**, \$2,365 (also in 10' dia.); **steel base** with casters, \$465; by *Santa Barbara Designs*, to the trade from *DelGreco Company*. For other sources, call *Santa Barbara Designs*. **Next Century Umbrella**, #NCT-8, \$1,485 (also in other fabrics); **steel powder-coated base**, \$395; by *Giati*