

# MAJESTIC METROPOLITAN LIVING

VISIONARY HOMES IN THE  
HEART OF CITIES

SUE HOSTETLER

## JUST VISITING

“Begin with the end in mind.” Simple advice to follow, when baking a cake or giving a speech. But only those with incredible vision and even more courage could apply that concept when converting a dilapidated 28,000-square-foot New York City building into a dream home. Again . . . that’s 28,000 square feet. In New York City.

Walking down the popular Tribeca street where the building sits, it is hard to imagine that the distinguished and immaculate stucco structure was ever abandoned or in disrepair. “I used to walk the dog with a list of available buildings,” says the owner, who eventually bought the building with her husband. “When I saw this one in late 2000, it was boarded up and the first floor was completely covered, but you could see it was still beautiful.” Tired of living under the rules and regulations of co-ops and wanting more room for themselves, their three children, and their dog, the family looked for a vacant building for more than six years. (The owners succinctly describe this period as “Look . . . get disappointed . . . renovate current apartment . . . look . . . get disappointed . . . buy new apartment . . . look. . . .”) Though they had no definitive size requirement, they knew they needed something wide—wide enough to accommodate the large scale of their art collection.

**OPPOSITE** Joe Jaroff created the brilliant suspended glass staircase, topped off with a skylight that seemingly electrifies each step and transfers natural brightness to every floor.





Most New York City townhouses run on average anywhere from 18 to 23 feet in width. But this place (in what has become one of the most popular and expensive neighborhoods in the city) was different—namely, it was a building, not a house, so it was a princely 40 feet wide, 100 feet deep, and eight stories tall (including six aboveground, one basement, and one subbasement).

Built around 1859, the structure was one of a group of three original buildings that were used as dry goods department stores, later becoming a wholesale shoe warehouse. The couple were first shown the property in the fall of 2000 and quickly made it theirs. They began renovation in August of 2001, and then on September 11 the Twin Towers fell just a few blocks south, halting work for four months of the nearly three-year project. "Every single thing you can think of needed work," remembers the wife. "A new sewer line to the street, creating a gas line that never existed, replacing the back wall on the lower floors that had basically fallen off, placing steel beams under the sidewalk, restoring the interior brick, and raising the roof, to name just a few projects." Most complicated, though, might have been restoring the façade of the building, as most of North Tribeca has been landmarked since 1992. (New York City's Landmarks Preservation Commission seeks to protect those neighborhoods with historically significant architecture, ensuring that there is continuity in materials, texture, and lines when a building is being renovated. This mandate can generate what some perceive to be creative limitations.) These owners endured the accompanying customary years of paperwork and logistics, using the building's history almost as a guide or course of action. "We would never do anything other than a restoration," says the wife. "The building exists as a permanent historical structure—we are just visiting."

**LEFT** The fourth-floor gallery provides a gracious public area separating the master suite, children's bedrooms, and laundry area. An Andrew Polk painting adds a jolt of orange and saffron. Joe Jaroff custom made the beautiful vitrine on the left.

This philosophy clearly informed their design scheme, which can be summed up in one word: *temporary*. The part Boffi, part custom-made stainless-steel kitchen is not traditionally “built in”—it stands on legs with open shelves and could be easily disassembled and moved. The Daniel Romualdez-designed bookcases also have legs and no backs. The lighting, air-conditioning, and even the staircase are hung by wires. “We can just cut the wires, pick up our stuff, and go,” says the wife. “The building existed before us, and with our work and hope, it will live on after us.”

In the end the owners did divide up some of the immense space, leasing to retail on the street level and renting out a few apartments on the second and third floors. As the final product reveals, the couple clearly didn’t need the entire building to make their grand statement. Stepping out of the elevator into the family’s home, which occupies the top three floors (and basement), can only be described as utterly mind-blowing. A transcendent suspended glass and metal staircase, topped off with a skylight, immediately grabs attention, anchoring the space in an unparalleled way. Joe Jaroff of Mison Concepts has made a bold, dazzling, and completely contemporary statement (and achieved a “major engineering feat” according to the owners); the staircase updates the historic building with a funky urban gloss. (It was also an ingenious way to transfer light to all three floors.) The 14-foot ceilings, effervescent interiors, and jolts of color on the walls make the space feel electric. On the top floor sits a seductive lounge-cum-game room, complete with pool table and baby grand piano. Light floods this entire floor from a skylight along the front and a wall of gorgeous gridlike stainless-steel windows along the back, which lead to a spectacular rooftop terrace. Patricia McCobb—who is

**RIGHT** Sleek stainless-steel Boffi cabinetry and counters, juxtaposed against the original brick wall from the 1800s, give the kitchen a luxe contemporary update. Putnam Ladder Company makes the rolling ladder. A skylight bathes the space in natural illumination.





The massive main living floor is spectacularly dramatic, with 14-foot ceilings, pulsating cherry red perimeter walls, and no dividing walls (instead, a standing bookcase at far back left separates the library from a generous office/family computer room). A fresh white upholstered sofa and chairs came from ABC Carpet and are paired with an elegant Indian daybed. Two oversized works on paper by Doug and Mike Starn hang on the brick wall.

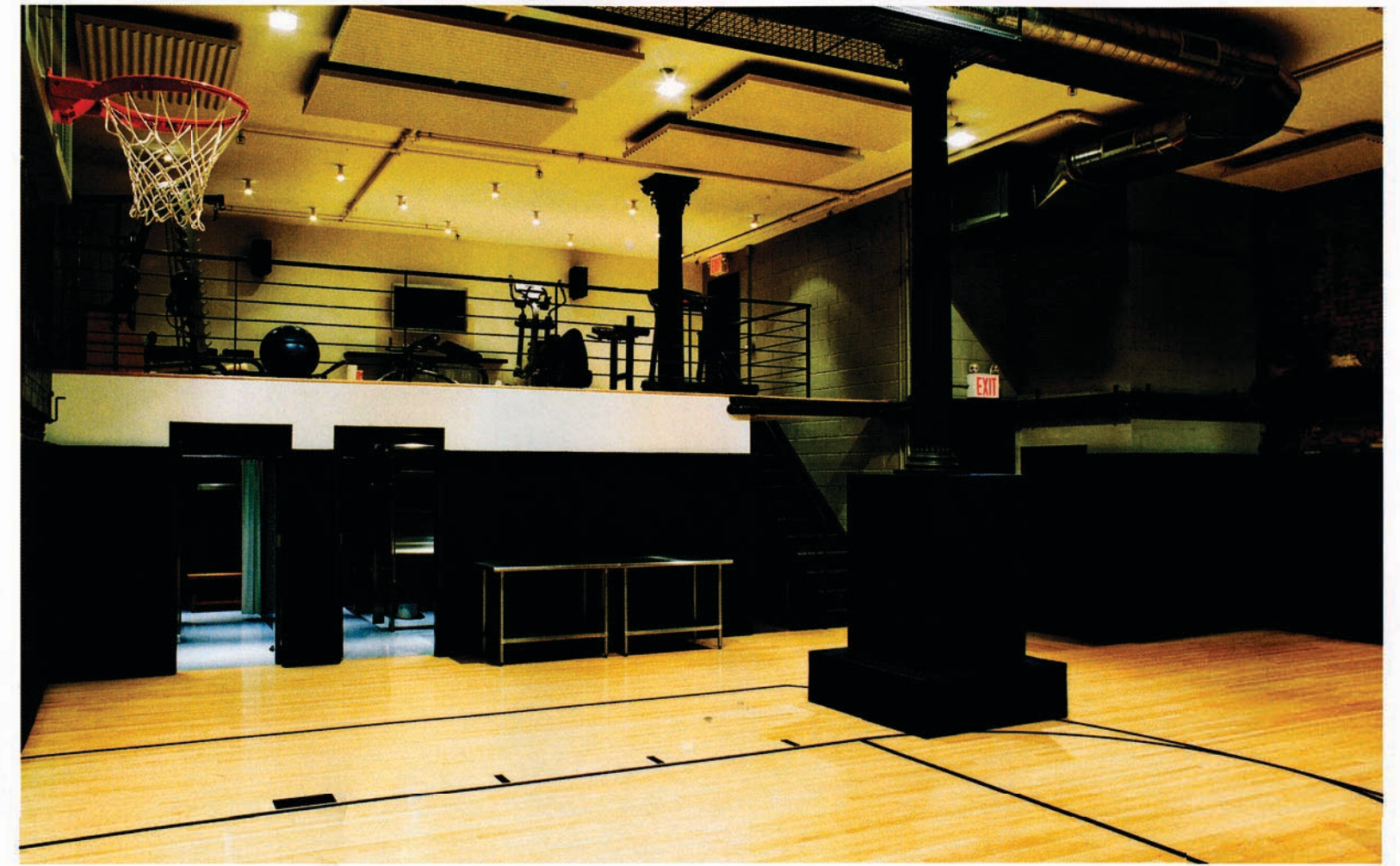


responsible for the renovation of the Great Lawn in Central Park—designed a charming city escape, full of planted boxes, seating areas, and intricate irrigation.

The seductive soul of the home is the main living level. Everywhere one looks are flawless examples of work that a group of superstar artisans contributed to the home. Architect Mario Rivelli is responsible for the gracious layout and constructed the fireplace Daniel Romualdez designed to seamlessly accompany the original brick. All of the wood floors were lifted, planed, and replaced by Norwegian Wood, then stained a very specific mix of brown/black by John Pomiankowski. “We went to a stable in Montauk, so I could show him a horse whose depth of color I wanted to match,” remembers the wife.

The lowest level contains all of the private rooms, including a jaw-dropping master suite. Its accompanying bath is a lavishly sexy wraparound affair with several different areas and cowhide rugs. Though surely the grandest design gesture of all for an urban residence is the subterranean basketball court (with 17-foot ceilings) and mezzanine gym that the couple created out of what was originally two basement levels, where the children have entertained their entire school classes.

Supporting the floors in a building of this size and age is a feat in and of itself. Luckily the structure was one of the first of its time to be made with steel beams, which are, unbelievably, close to 18 inches thick. “When we cut out the opening to build the stairs,” remembers the husband, “we were shocked to find that it was already framed by steel girders.” Rumor has it that the building originally had a center courtyard, currently where the stairs reside. “This made our job of securing the staircase much easier,” he adds. An additional difficulty with many large homes is concealing the enormous amount of mechanical elements that it takes to power the space—something this family wanted to ensure did not visually interfere with the design. To achieve this goal, they dropped ceilings only in



closets to hide air handlers and ductwork. “You should know that our architect and AC contractor thought we were insane for being so demanding in this regard,” chuckles the husband.

Visitors must wonder if having so much space in New York City makes it an easier place to live, a better place to live, than the suburbs. Or simply what it’s like for just one family to live in such a large home. “Yes . . . it’s nicer,” laughs the wife. “And yes, everyone comments. I think more people are staying in the city as a basic economic fact—we’ve moved from a city of renters to a city of owners, which makes it harder to move. And personally, we can’t see the appeal of the suburbs.” It’s no wonder.

**ABOVE** The original building included two basement levels, which the owners combined to create a basketball court, a mezzanine gym, and two locker rooms.

**OPPOSITE, ABOVE** A cool metal-ball-beaded curtain conceals one of the children’s rooms, decked out in a zebra-print rug. The bright red walls and ocean blue chair lend energy to the space.

**OPPOSITE, BELOW** Award-winning landscape architect Patricia McCobb designed an urban oasis of boxed plantings that surround the rooftop retreat. Comfortable teak and upholstered furnishings from Kingsley-Bate are sprinkled throughout the vast deck, offering stellar views of New York City from every seat.



**ABOVE** An oasis of calm and serenity, the master bath features muted Calcutta marble counters and floor tiles from Urban Archaeology. All fixtures are Waterworks, and the cowhide rug was found at the El Paso Trading Company.

**RIGHT** The owner's use of epic skylights as well as side lot-line windows along the far wall of the top floor was a clever design solution to ensure the old dry goods department store would draw in plenty of light. A white Mies van der Rohe leather Barcelona lounge can be seen in the left foreground; an antique Steinway grand piano is in the background.





The enormous top floor has a glossy, cool boutique-hotel vibe. Norwegian Wood added the gleaming wood ceiling that almost seems like a contemporary nod to modern master Richard Neutra. The B&B Italia white sofa and a pair of iconic Barcelona chairs pop against the nearly black stained floors and ceiling.



Savvy city residents are coming up with innovative ways to carve out larger living spaces for themselves. The people profiled in this book have combined apartments, converted former schools and commercial and industrial properties, even added new floors on top of an old shoe factory built in the 1800s in order to realize their own larger-than-life metropolitan dreams.

—from the Introduction

A tour through some of the most unique and beautifully designed urban residences, *Majestic Metropolitan Living* reveals how nineteen visionaries have created their own personal oases in the heart of the city.



U.S. \$65.00 / \$79.00 CAN

HOUSE & HOME

ISBN 978-0-307-40918-8



9 780307 409188

56500