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This Clever Renovation Brings Old World Glamour to an Uninviting Urban Apartment

Sumptuous color, organic textures and vintage furnishings coax warmth into a chilly New York apartment, courtesy of a cult-favorite design team from Los Angeles

By Jessica Ritz

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THE BICOASTAL POWER COUPLE who purchased this lower Manhattan loft in late 2019 knew that the über-urban space needed some softening—and that Los Angeles interior design firm Nickey Kehoe, famous for their romantic SoCal-meets-Old World stylings, would be ideal for the job. Recalled co-founder Amy Kehoe, “They wanted to lean hard on making the space feel very classic, old-school glamorous.” Think the antithesis of the antiseptic American Psycho aesthetic.

Luckily, the circa 1903 three-bedroom’s dramatic bones and compelling architectural features—thick brick walls, vaulted ceilings and expanses of windows—hinted at the plush possibilities. Step one of the meticulous nearly two-year renovation? A rejiggering of the floor plan aimed at remedying past missteps. “Everything was long and skinny,” said Kehoe—especially a poorly proportioned kitchen that accentuated what the team dubbed the “runway effect.” Carving the floor-spanning apartment into well-proportioned zones instantly cozied things up.

Next came reimagining color and décor to counterprogram any lingering associations with industry. To coax warmth into a sitting room, serene green on the walls replaced “repressive” black. Underfoot, richly stained hardwood and complex parquet provided a grounding in luxury. “The [elegance] dial went way up,” Kehoe said.

Here, a look at the warm, sophisticated results, plus counsel on how to strike the same balance in your space.



PHOTO: HARIS KENJAR

Tip 1: Opt for organic

In the spare but sophisticated dining vignette, Kehoe leaned on soft, rounded shapes—echoed in the barrel-vaulted ceiling—to help shift the vibe from industrial to elegant. Throughout, existing wood floors received a fresh lick of walnut stain, introducing gravitas and grounding the space. At center, a sleek wood-and-glass ring chandelier hangs like a halo over a circular dining table paired with rustic Guillerme et Chambron chairs and deluxe Zak + Fox cushions. The finishing touch: delicate linen cafe curtains—a motif the designers repeated in varying fabrics throughout the apartment—soften the jumbo windows, “letting light in during the day but [giving] a little privacy to their private life,” said Kehoe.



PHOTO: HARIS KENJAR

Tip 2: Turn down the volume

Sometimes smaller is better. Case in point: Instead of a frenetic, “full bleed, everything happens in the same space” kitchen, Kehoe and her team opted to remove and reorient the existing oversize island, creating an understated, elegantly proportioned footprint instead. “It was instantly settling,” she explained. Applied to the brick walls, ceilings and exposed pipes, a slick of Snowfall White by Benjamin Moore further lowers the volume, while a black wood range hood, dark cabinetry and honed-stone countertops add quiet contrast. Finally, for a bit of brightness, polished-brass adjustable pendants by Florian Schulz catch the eye without busying the composition.



PHOTO: HARIS KENJAR

Tip 3: Dare to saturate

“The owners like color, so we used that as a gateway,” Kehoe said of her creative-industry clients. Here, in what began as a “very repressive black” multipurpose reading, gaming and music room, the team embraced an inspiration image of a vintage French interior swathed in icy green as an opportunity for “a huge detour.” Though painting antique woodwork “sometimes feels like sacrilege,” in this instance Benjamin Moore’s Feather Green paint proved transformative, said Kehoe—and the allover tactic elevates the room’s elaborate paneling and millwork details, too. “It’s really a surprise and delight.”

A pair of Art Deco-inspired club chairs covered in a matching mint velvet “nod to the idea of the gentleman’s room,” while a chaise longue upholstered with Claremont’s Tree of Life fabric lends “fancifulness.” Anchoring the ceiling is an amber glass pendant from Austrian maker Woka that fast became the husband’s favorite detail. “He’s bananas for it,” the designer said.



PHOTO: HARIS KENJAR

Tip 4: Create cozy zones

Carving intimate but grandly scaled rooms out of the open living plan helped mitigate the loft's original "weird and skinny" layout, said Kehoe. In the airy primary suite, a series of cramped walls was removed to make way for a sumptuous mix of new and vintage furnishings. Low, built-in bookcases at the perimeter provide a perch for plants, while a curvaceous accent chair interrupts their linearity. Hand-painted gilt wallpaper from Iksel delivers serious bling from behind the headboard. It's "a little earthy and a little playful," Kehoe said. Vintage sari bedding from John Derian swaddles the majestic oak bed from the eponymous Nickey Kehoe collection.



PHOTO: HARIS KENJAR

Tip 5: Go for the glam

As the site of one of the most intensive makeovers in the apartment, the primary bathroom became a stage on which the team “pushed the idea of New York City glamour and elegance,” to dramatic ends, Kehoe said. “We felt like we could really [use it] to bring some soul into the loft.”

From the custom vanity, made of brass and caramel-threaded Calacatta Paonazzo marble, to the new, intricately parquetry floors topped with a vintage Persian rug, nothing about the space says “former factory.” Doors composed of unlacquered brass, fluted glass and stone trim gracefully frame a generous walk-in shower, while on the stall interior, a milky plaster wall treatment offsets some of the glitz. Above, a vintage chandelier complements sconces from Howe in London topped with perforated paper shades. “They’re humble but elegant,” said Kehoe of the wall-hung fixtures. “I love that intersection.”

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