

Every room serves a purpose and despite there being no doors, the boundaries are clearly stated by the interior architecture. The suspension light in patinated brass above the kitchen island is by Florian Schulz.



In an ombré journey across four floors, this Brooklyn townhouse blends all-American original features with Scandi influences and Southern European charm. Created by Brussels-based architect Nicolas Schuybroek, the interior sanctuary is an exercise in contrast and calm where each element ties seamlessly to the next.

TEXT MARLENE TOLBOD JAKOBSEN PHOTOGRAPHY PIET-ALBERT GOETHALS

L A Y E R S

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L I V I N G

PORTRAIT MATHIEU SALVAING CITY VIEW PHOTOGRAPHY NICOLAS SCHUYBROEK



WE VISITED

A European-American couple's New York townhouse, completely renovated and decorated by Nicolas Schuybroek Architects.

THE RESIDENCE

A classic 600 square metre brownstone on Columbia Heights in Brooklyn, comprising four floors and a soon-to-be-completed rooftop terrace overlooking the East River and the Manhattan skyline.

ARCHITECT NICOLAS SCHUYBROEK'S RECENT brownstone project has been one of many firsts. Not only did he get the opportunity to actually go house hunting with his clients and see a variety of potential homes with them, but he also got to work within existing architecture instead of building a structure from scratch, straying from the architectural path he usually walks. And then, when Covid hit, right after the drywall was put up, he had to orchestrate every little detail from a screen abroad and come to terms with the fact that the owners moved in eight months before he himself had the opportunity to inspect the finished house.

"Hopefully never again," he laughs about not being able to go over the final tweaks.

"I had of course seen pictures but had absolutely no idea how it was actually going to feel entering the house. I was holding my heart when I rang the bell for the first time," he remembers.

However, he had nothing to worry about. Besides a few bits and bobs, both he and the owners were beyond thrilled with the result. The brief from the couple had been to create a family retreat with a contemporary and architectural approach to the interior, with everything bespoke – sort of an haute couture kind of home.

"First thing on the agenda was to find common ground for the design aesthetics with the owners. She grew up in Europe; he's American, and

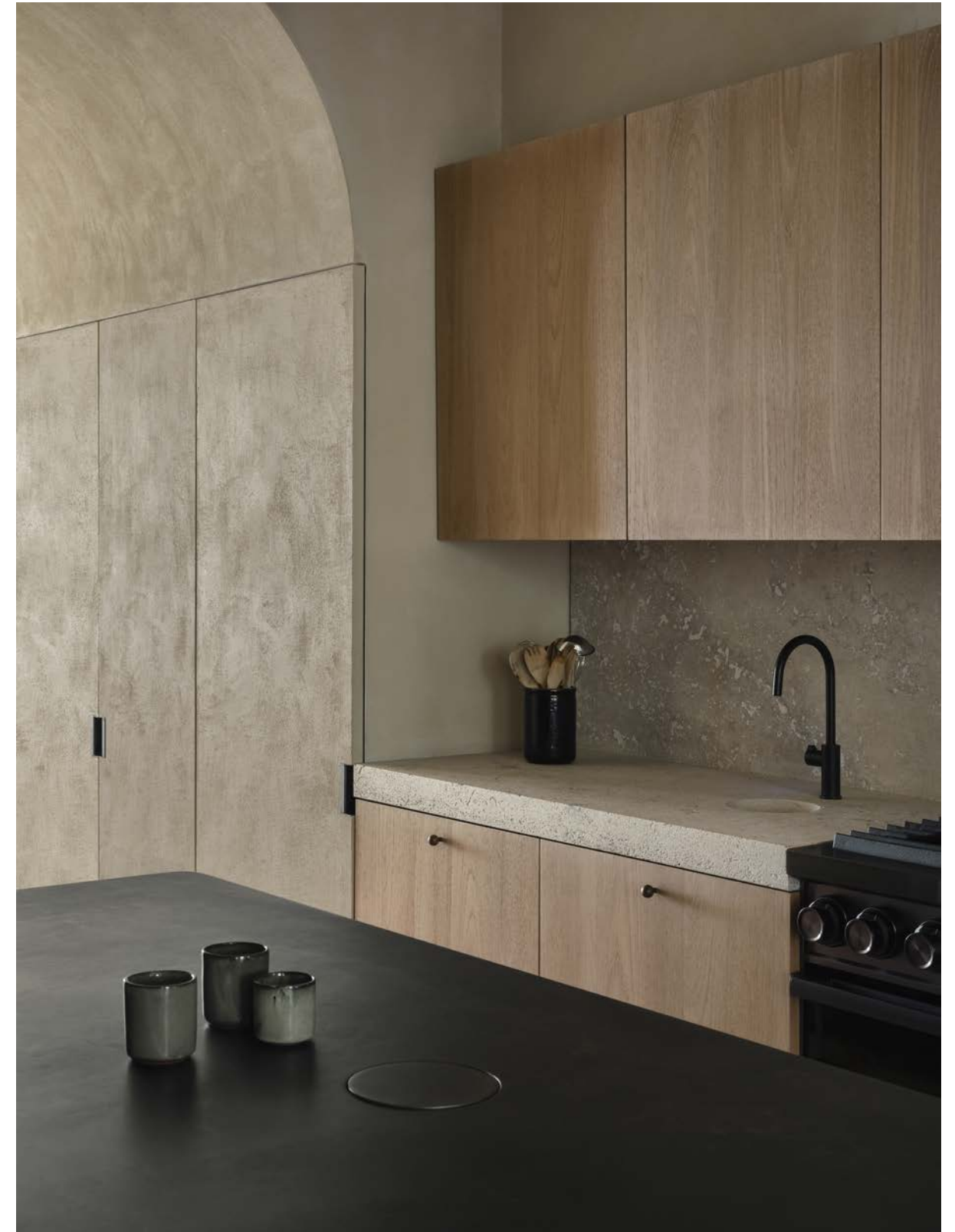
both of them have a slightly more classical style than what we normally do. So, we imagined what kind of colours, materials, tactility and layering could add warmth and still respect their wish to have more a classical atmosphere, an exercise that worked well in this house. You can still clearly feel you're in a New York townhouse," Schuybroek explains and recalls when he saw the house for the first time:

"It felt unreal. It faces Manhattan with views of downtown, the Statue of Liberty, the Brooklyn Bridge, Wall Street and the beautiful Brooklyn promenade with the water and surrounding nature. The street it's on is beautiful, with rows of connected brownstones, and old trees planted so densely that they meet on top, creating a canopy above the street. It was really unique that we visited different houses together with the owners and had something to compare and contrast about the locations and possibilities. That's never happened before. Often we're brought in after the fact. This house was really a no-brainer for me."

The mantra for the gut renovation became proportion, proportion, proportion. Schuybroek got rid of all the unnecessary non-bearing structures inside to get a sense of how everything could be restructured.

"We crafted an almost mathematical system to make sure we could generate the most beautiful and comfortable rooms," he says.

This decorating equation consisted of several variables and the house was



The kitchen in stained oak, travertine and black stainless steel lends, according to Schuybroek, a more sculptural and European industrial touch. All custom made by Nicolas Schuybroek Architects.

Bay windows are traditional brownstone architecture, and as the house is a landmark building the exterior structure has not been touched. Nicolas Schuybroek furthermore left the panelling around the windows, really underlining the classic American touch. The easy chair is by Märta Blomstedt and the pine side table is by Axel Einar Hjorth.



As the owners have a big family scattered all over the world, the house has been equipped to host lots of guests. In addition to the family dining room on the second floor, this one also seats plenty of company on linen upholstered chairs around a big antique table. The painting is by Callum Innes.

redone entirely around sequences: a horizontal sequence within each floor, three rooms adjoining, one seamlessly fading into the next. The rooms facing the street have higher ceilings that let in more light and feel more open, while the room in the middle has a lower ceiling, creating a cocoon-like atmosphere. Then there's the vertical sequence of the floors stacked upon one another, each unique in its own right, yet each also continuing a reference from the former, almost like an ombré colour scheme and a trip around the world through interior references, going from bottom to top: dark American, earthy toned Southern European, light Scandinavian.

"People's first reaction is that they don't know how to classify the interior: it looks American, yet still feels European," Schuybroek notes.

Usually when Nicolas Schuybroek tackles a project like this, he has a palette of four to five different materials that are used consistently throughout a house. Here, he has done the same, but per floor instead. On the parlour floor, for example, the idea was to extend the colour and the textures of the façade all the way through, as seen in the many hues of brown. On the second floor, which is the family's living space with the kitchen, a dining room and children's playroom, the limewashed walls add intriguing texture and catch the North-Eastern light in such a way it never feels dark in there. In the private quarters on the third floor the atmosphere is softer with fabric panelling in the dressing room, closely related in colour to the marble in the bathroom. And that is the clever beauty of the house: one detail weaving into the next, leaving no part not connected. /



Once you hit the second floor, the home opens up in lighter colours with an almost Mediterranean feel that transports you to both Italian and French country houses. The cupboard is an 18th century Italian piece and the dark teak table is by Pierre Jeanneret. The chairs are Børge Mogensen for P. Lauritsen & Søn and the artwork is Volker Hüller's *Lost in the stars*.

The terracotta floor tiles are a nod to the façade. Here, we again see how Schuybroek has lowered the ceiling in the middle room by creating an archway clad with built-in cupboards leading to the kitchen.





A simple yet sculptural interior makes up the family dining room. The fireplace adds an extra touch of cosiness. The mobile chandelier is by Michael Anastassiades.



Beautiful original carpentry that immediately caught Nicolas Schuybroek's eye when he viewed the house, which hadn't been touched interior-wise for 40 years.



The textures are almost palpable from merely looking at them. Here it is an Utō console table in pine designed in 1932 by Axel Einar Hjorth, layered against a white concrete wall sconce by Kalou Dubus and a piece by Ida Barbarigo.

Everything has been custom made for the house. The owners had a good base of artworks and a few good pieces of furniture while the rest was curated during the process. This is also what makes this house so personal: there was a consistent conversation about new purchases of art and furniture and the positioning of it, making everything a very good match.





Informed by the brownstone façade, the parlour floor's density and rich textures are underscored by the preservation of original features such as the fireplace and wooden panelling. The large sitting room is sparsely furnished with a few signature pieces: sofas from Axel Vervoordt upholstered in raw Belgian linen, Märta Blomstedt's 1939 Wing chair, a low coffee table in black slate also from Axel Vervoordt and a vintage stool in darkened oak. The artworks are Ida Barbarigo's *Three Gentlemen*, 1979 and Tyrrell Winston's *Snow Bird (Tom Brady)*, 2021, which accentuate the limewashed walls.

Nicolas Schuybroek has designed the built-in library in walnut wood, which sits against a lowered ceiling. The change in ceiling height makes the floor come together as a dynamic and coherent unit, an interior tactic employed throughout the house. The console table in the middle is an antique.



Facing the windows in the dressing room is also a small office space. The table and chair are by Elna Kiljander, accompanied by a vintage brass lamp and vintage edition of Børge Mogensen's Spanish chair. The photograph is by Horst P. Horst.



A huge walk-in wardrobe dedicated to clean lines and an appreciation of the qualities of different wood types. A vintage 19th century Italian dresser in walnut takes centre stage with an Ingo Maurer Floatation lamp above it.

The higher you climb in the house, the lighter and softer the room atmosphere becomes. The master bedroom is a little piece of heaven with its white on white and expertly placed wooden elements. The bed is custom made, covered in Holland & Sherry fabric. The armchair is designed by Vladimir Kagan, the milking stool is vintage and the low table is by Axel Einar Hjorth.



An en suite bathroom makes for the ultimate luxury, entirely custom made in white Portuguese marble.