



TEMPLER
TOWN HOUSE

This page, Workshop For Architecture's Chelsea town house for creative director Karl Templer features a striking kitchen bar, wrapped in marble to give the illusion of a monolithic block. Opposite, the living room is furnished with an Eames lounge chair and a Svenskt Tenn 'Liljevalch' sofa in a Josef Frank 'Green Birds' print.



Fashion houses

As tailored as a bespoke suit, residences by John Lee's Workshop For Architecture are a perfect fit for New York's super stylists

PHOTOGRAPHY: FLOTO+WARNER WRITER: MIMI ZEIGER

RICHARDSON
& DONDOE LOFT

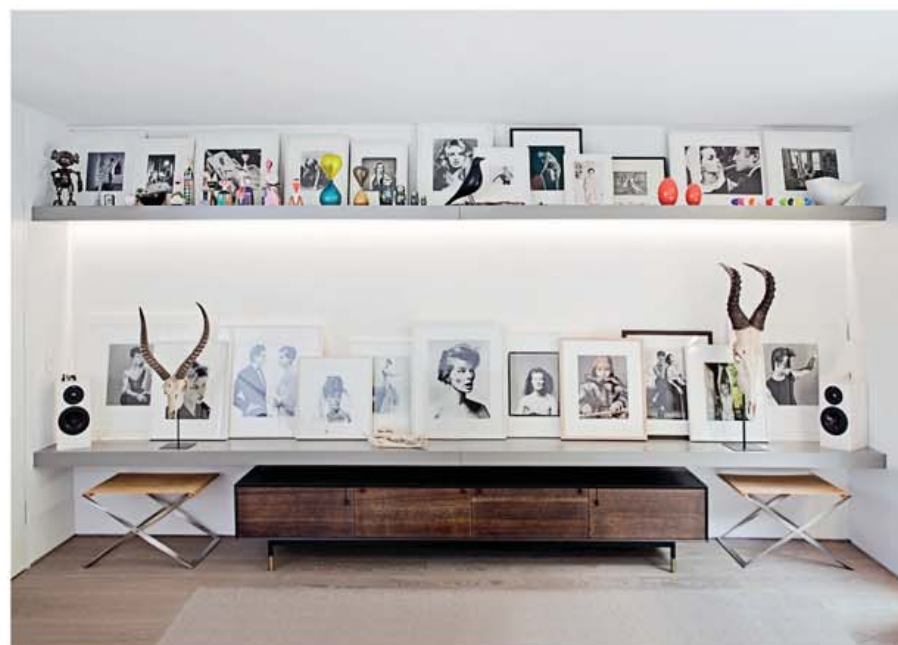
The mahogany kitchen in Richardson and Dondoe's Lower East Side loft is the work of New York- and Seattle-based firm Henrybuilt

Architect John Lee sits at a small round table piled with computer renderings and design books in his Chelsea office. He's pushed aside a Carlos Scarpa monograph to make room for our conversation, and we pore over floor plans and photographs of two of his recent projects: the first is a loft for model Diana Dondoe and her husband Andrew Richardson, fashion stylist and editor of *Richardson* magazine, a heady cocktail of art, sex and fashion; the second a town house for *Interview* magazine's creative director Karl Templer. Clad in a tasteful charcoal grey sweater and a pair of pearl grey tortoiseshell glasses, he looks every bit the Harvard-trained architect.

Lee practised architecture for two decades, working in some of New York City's best regarded firms, including Pei Cobb Freed & Partners and KPF, before founding Workshop For Architecture in 2003. It still takes a bit of explanation on Lee's part to describe how he fell into fashion's swirling orbit. With low-key precision, he talks me through the string of connections that have made Workshop For Architecture the go-to firm for the fashion cognoscenti: some years ago he designed an apartment for German-born model and artist Christina Kruse; she recommended the architecture firm to Templer (Kruse and Templer have a son together); then Templer spread the word to Richardson and Dondoe.

Lee describes his clients as 'a talented group of people making the big decisions behind fashion. They are strong in their opinions about aesthetics and design.' As a result, they are drawn to the Workshop For Architecture's understated house style for its attention to proportion, light and refined detailing. 'Because the fashion world is so hectic and chaotic and full of images, my architecture is a refuge, a quiet space. It is very liveable, a kind of functional minimalism,' he explains, adding that 'there can be a minimalism which is about bringing the function of things down to their essence without being stylistic'. Lee goes on to cite Louis I Kahn, one of modern architecture's most functionalist masters. 'Kahn said that architecture must begin with the "immeasurable", go through the "measurable" and in the end must be "immeasurable". I enjoy the poetics of an intelligently engineered imagination.'

Unlike some emerging architects who make a name for themselves with flashy moves and indulgent flourishes, Lee

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Above, propped up on generous shelves are photographs by Richard Avedon, Irving Penn, Helmut Newton, Steven Meisel and Bruce Weber. The credenza is by BDDW. Below, as seen on the stairs and in the dining room, the muted palette of white walls and grey floors is designed to complement Templer's furnishings

designs buildings tailored like bespoke suits. His spaces showcase the eclectic tastes and evolving collections of art and furniture of his clients without ever becoming a drab background – as illustrated by Templer's brick-fronted town house in Manhattan's Chelsea neighbourhood. In addition to his role at *Interview* where, among other duties, he writes the Consumption: I Am What I Buy blog, Templer directs advertising campaigns for Calvin Klein, Louis Vuitton and Valentino. Pictures by friends, mentors and artists he admires fill his living room. Hung on white walls and propped up on generous shelves are photographs by Richard Avedon, Irving Penn, Helmut Newton, Steven Meisel and Bruce Weber. Although intensely curated,

the room never feels sterile or stuffy like an art gallery. It has its homey quirks: a worn-in Eames lounge chair, a built-in flat-screen TV. And a big chunk of the floor is taken up by an oversized sofa upholstered in a raucous bird print by early 20th century Swedish designer Josef Frank. 'The house gets dirty. It gets handprints on the walls. It isn't like a museum. The carpet gets spots and we have to clean up. It is a living house, not a bachelor pad,' says Templer, who lives in the town house with his five-year-old son.

Lee and Templer worked together on the floor plan to create a flow from the street to the backyard. The journey leads from a small vestibule through a modest dining room, past a bold spiral staircase, to a 15ft-wide picture window that takes over the whole back wall of the house. Lee kept the overall material palette muted in order to complement Templer's furnishings: walls are white and the floor, stair treads and curtains are all a consistent warm grey tone. In the kitchen, all appliances hide behind full-height grey cabinet doors. Here, Lee's careful detailing produced a sculptural bar: white Calacatta marble wraps the sides and countertop and gives the illusion of a monolithic block. The downplayed hues emphasise the fact that much of the house is focused on the south-facing garden, an outdoor living space nearly the same size as the ground floor. The grey stained oak floor extends past the threshold to create a wooden deck. The window, made by the Swiss company Sky-Frame, has a narrow frame and seems to disappear into the view. Beyond, the stately London Terrace, a large apartment complex from 1928, looms over the outdoor room. The grand edifice itself becomes an ersatz collectible. 'It's foreboding,' says Templer, 'almost like a cruise ship.'

Further downtown, Lee's architectural expertise stripped all but the essentials >>



**RICHARDSON
& DONDOE LOFT**

The Sky-Frame glass wall, which replaced standard casement windows, floods the living areas with light and offers views of the tree canopy in Sara D Roosevelt Park.



from Richardson and Dondoe's Lower East Side two-bedroom loft. 'They were not interested in making just a pure white space, even if it ended up a little something like that,' Lee recalls. 'They wanted the bones of the space to be really clear and pronounced.' Faced with a long, narrow floor plan, Lee's challenge was getting natural light into the space. As at the Templer residence, he used a minimalist Sky-Frame glass wall to flood the living and kitchen areas with sunlight. Now, the picture window, which replaced a series of standard casement openings, frames the tree canopy of the nearby Sara D Roosevelt Park.

The bigger issue was how to contend with four existing windows on the south wall that faced onto an alley. Lee needed these openings to illuminate the study and the master bedroom and bathroom, so covering them up wasn't an option. Inspired by Pierre Chareau's 1932 proto hi-tech masterpiece, the *Maison de Verre* in Paris, Richardson suggested glass blocks to obscure the view and block the noise. The client and architect ultimately decided on Japanese blocks that resembled the Parisian originals.

It's oddly fitting that Richardson admires the *Maison de Verre*, originally built for Dr Jean Dalsace, a gynecologist. 'I sometimes feel like a gynecologist myself — of magazines,' Richardson muses. 'In that the magazine that I do is removed from the end by-product of sex in the same way that a gynecologist has to remove himself from his work. The magazine is more about being analytical than delivering an orgasm.'

Like the Chelsea town house, the loft follows the Workshop For Architecture's reductive aesthetic. The floor is poured concrete (with radiant underfloor heating), there are no mouldings or skirting boards, and the kitchen is simply finished in mahogany cabinets by the New York- and Seattle-based company Henrybuilt. The design also leaves room for the clients' personal obsessions. The architecture is set off by Richardson and Dondoe's collection of early 20th century design: vintage Bauhaus pendants hang over a Donald Judd-inspired dining room table surrounded by chairs sold off by New York Public Library; a series of Charlotte Perriand wall sconces, which the couple found on eBay, march down the hall; and a Serge Mouille spider lamp hangs in the living room. 'It's the kind with breasts... those nipple-shaped shades,' says Richardson. 'Or maybe that's just the way I see them.' ★

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