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: FLIO+WAINER WRITER: MIHEDZER
designs buildings tailored like bespoke suits. His spaces showcase the eclectic 
items and evolving collections of art and furniture of his clients without ever 
becoming a drab backdrop— as illustrated by Temple's brick-faced 
townhouse in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood. In addition to his role 
as interior designer, among other duties, he writes the column I Am What I Buy blog, Temple directs advertising campaigns for Calvin Klein, Louis Vuitton 
and Valentino. Pictures by friends, mentors and artists' assistants fill his 
living room. Hung on white walls and propped up in numerous shelves are 
photographs by Richard Avenem, living form, Helmut Newton, Norman Mailer and Bruce Weber. Although everyday casual, 
the room never feels sterile or stuffy like 
an art gallery. It has honey-colored 
wooden floors that glow, a built-in 
flatscreen TV. And a big think of the 
floor is taken up by an overstuffed sofa 
upholstered in a mocha-brown print by 
early 20th century Swedish designer Josef 
Frank. The house gets dark. It goes 
groundswine on the walls. It isn't like 
a moose. The carpet goes soft and we 
have to shed up. It is a living house, not 
a bachelor pad, says Temple, who lives in 
the town house with his five-year-old son. 
Lei and Temple worked together on 
the floor plan to create a flow from the 
entrance to the backyard. The journey 
leads from a small vestibule through a 
modest dining room, past a bold spiral staircase, 
to a sweeping piano window that takes 
over the whole back wall of the house. 
Lei kept the overall material palette 
true to complement Temple's furnishings: walls are white and the 
floor, with a touch of carpet and curtains 
are all a consistent warm grey tone. In the kitchen, 
aquamarine blue behind full-height grey cabinets. Here, Lei's careful 
detailing produced a sculptural bar: white 
Calcutta marble wraps the sides 
and countertops and gives the illusion 
of a monolithic block. The downplayed 
hues emphasize 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 gray tinted 
skylight 
floor extends past the threshold to create 
a wooden desk. The window, made by the 
Swiss company P+S-Frame, has a narrow 
frame and seems to disappear into the 
view, beyond, the sturdy Le Corbusier, 
a large apartment complex from next 
rooms over the outdoor room. The grand 
advice itself becomes an intricate 
"muse." Temple, Seems like a cruise ship. 
Further downtown, Lei's architectural 
expertise wept this all but the essentials.
from Richardson and Donna’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 real 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 minimalistic 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 East River Park.

The bigger issue was how to reorient with four existing windows on the north wall that faced onto an alley. Lee needed these openings to illuminate the study and the master bedroom and bathroom, as covering them wasn’t an option. Inspired by Pierre Chareau’s 1928 proto hi-tech masterpiece, the Maisons 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 French originals.

It’s oddly fitting that Richardson admires the Maisons de Verre, originally built for Dr Jean Dausse, a gynecologist. “I sometimes feel like a gynecologist myself — of magazines,” Richardson muses. “That is the magazine that I do is reared 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 analyzed than delivering an orgasm.”

Like the Chelsea town house, the loft follows the Workshop for Architecture’s reductive aesthetic. The floor is paved concrete (with radiant underfloor heating), there are no moldings or skirting boards, and the kitchen is simply finished in mahogany cabinets by the New York–based cabinet company Henrybuilt. The design also leaves room for the clients’ personal obsessions. The architecture is set off by Richardson and Donna’s collection of early 20th-century design: vintage Bauhaus pendant lamp from over a Chandelier Judi-inspired dining room table surrounded by chairs sold by New York Public Library, a set of Charles Percival wall sconces, which the couple found on eBay, turned down the hall and a Serge Mouille spider lamp hangs in the living room. “It’s the kind with brass... with ruffled-shaped shades,” says Richardson. “Or maybe, it’s just the way I see them.”

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