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FOR HIS SISTER NANCY'S NEW YORK CITY TRIPLEX, ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNER STEPHEN LEE AND DECORATOR VICTORIA HAGAN CRAFT A SAVVY REVAMP COMPLETE WITH A SPACIOUS LIVING AREA THAT DOUBLES AS A RECITAL HALL

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IN PROGRESS

Designer Stephen Lee of the firm SLR Design gutted and rebuilt a Manhattan triplex for his sister, Nancy Lee, and her three teenage children, while Victoria Hagan Interiors devised the serene decor. The reconfigured second floor features a living area (foreground) furnished with a custom-made sofa and armchairs, all upholstered in Zinc Textile linens; the family area beyond boasts wood-framed Gio Ponti armchairs from Bernd Goeckler Antiques and a photograph by Meryl Salzinger. The rugs were custom made by Carini Lang. For details see Sources.



With walls of bleached anigre (left) and limestone (right), the entrance gallery leads to a showstopping staircase that ascends to the second-floor entertaining spaces; the ceramic sculpture on the console is by Soon Ai Lee. **Opposite:** Nancy Lee and her children (from left), David, Soona, and Matthew, around their Steinway & Sons grand piano in the living area, which also serves as a recital hall; the painting is by Joan Waltemath.

W

hen architectural designer Stephen Lee first saw the triplex penthouse that his sister, Nancy Lee, wanted to buy, in a prewar building overlooking Manhattan's Central Park, he was reminded of a jigsaw puzzle with missing pieces. The apartment, which had last been redone in 1970, was a warren of cramped, cluttered spaces. "The rooms were chopped up and isolated," he says. And the configuration—a full floor sandwiched between two partial floors on opposite sides of the building, with everything connected by spiral staircases—was clumsy. To complicate matters, the elevator went only as far as the home's first floor, but the main entrance was on the second. To get there, Stephen recalls, "you walked up the fire-exit stairway and across the landing into a three-foot-wide hall that felt like a black hole."

Nevertheless, the siblings agreed that the place had enormous potential. They had seen enough listings to know that 5,000 square feet with unobstructed panoramic views is a rarity in Manhattan. And they had always planned on a gut renovation to construct Nancy's ideal living room, which would double as a chamber-music recital hall, with pitch-perfect acoustics, a grand piano, and space for 100 guests. "I'm on several boards involving music education and healing," says Nancy, who often holds fundraising concerts featuring her talented teenage children: David on the piano, Matthew on the cello, and Soona on the violin.

Nancy gave her brother carte blanche for the overhaul, and he brought in decorator Victoria Hagan to conceive spare yet welcoming interiors. Having worked with his sister on her previous apartment, Stephen understood her aesthetic preferences. "I know Nancy dislikes architecture that's either too traditional or starkly modern, so I came up with something in between—I call it crafted modernism," says the designer, who employed a symphony of limestone, textured plaster, bleached ash, anigre, and onyx to define spaces that would flow into one another. Hagan, in turn, took her cues from the understated tones of the natural materials. "I used a palette of warm neutrals, from crisp ivory to deep charcoal," she notes, "to frame the family's active lifestyle and the apartment's spectacular views."

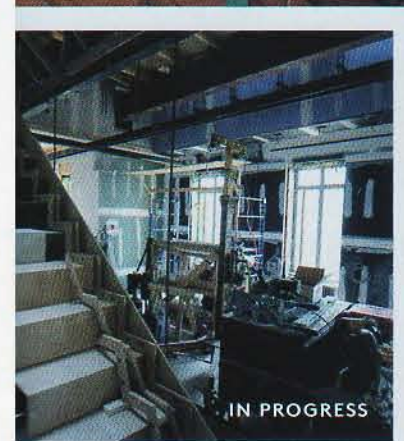
Devising the layout hinged on finding the right place for the living area and creating a proper entrance. What seemed the obvious solution—a foyer at the elevator landing leading straight back to a living room—was scrapped when Stephen discovered



that the middle level, without its drop ceilings, had the potential for 12-foot heights. So an open living space, with a family area at one end, went on the second floor instead, running along one side of the apartment, with the kitchen, dining room, den, and master bedroom opposite. A dramatic cantilevered staircase made of glass, blackened steel, and limestone rises up to the space from the new first-floor entrance gallery, positioned off the elevator. "I always try to do something structurally interesting with the stairs," says Stephen, who for this project consulted with the engineers behind the Apple Stores' striking staircases.

Ascending those steps to the living area provides a sense of anticipation that's fulfilled on arrival by the breathtaking scope of the space and its sweeping vistas of Central Park. But the eye is also drawn overhead to the medley of multilevel anigre beams and panels that conceal air-conditioning vents while providing "a feeling of warmth, enclosure, and coziness," Stephen says. Along with fabric wall coverings backed by acoustic tile, these ceiling panels also prevent sound from reverberating during recitals.

The living space, however, is not only for special occasions. When Nancy first met with Hagan to discuss the furnishings, they connected over the idea that there was no need to be



From top: Another view of the living area. In the den, artworks by the children are displayed above a custom-made Minotti sofa covered in a Mark Alexander linen; the cocktail table and X-form benches are by Lucca & Co., the latter cushioned in a Holly Hunt leather, while the carpet is by Marc Phillips Decorative Rugs. **Opposite:** The kitchen, whose soaring atrium was formerly a mechanical room, is equipped with a Gaggenau cooktop, a Miele hood, quartz counters, and a glass-tile backsplash; the stools are by Palo Samko.





precious. "I told Victoria that I'm not the type of person to use coasters," says Nancy, who had the family area outfitted with a huge TV hidden behind sliding doors for the kids' video games. To complement the bleached-ash flooring and white velvet walls, Hagan chose muted fabrics to cover vintage armchairs by Gio Ponti and T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbings and a custom-made sofa. "There's a yin-yang between the softness of the furniture and the strength of the architecture," the decorator observes.

And indeed, there's a gutsiness to Stephen's work, which shows itself in full force in the second-floor kitchen. "It's the most compelling space in the apartment," he says, tilting his head toward the 30-foot-high atrium that rises over the room's central island like an apse in a modernist church. Carved out of an old mechanical room, the soaring expanse is best appreciated from the cantilevered staircase that leads to the third floor, which includes a terrace and a golf-simulator room, perhaps the apartment's most colorful quirk. "All my kids are competitive golfers," Nancy says. Soona's skill, Stephen boasts, actually earned her a spot in the *Guinness Book of World Records*: At the age of five, she was the youngest girl ever to hit a hole in one.

The lofty kitchen opens to the corner dining room, which is minimally furnished to emphasize the park and skyline views. Stephen commissioned designer Lindsey Adelman to create a delicate brass chandelier with blown-glass orbs that refract the light, while Hagan devised the round polished-mahogany table that reflects the clouds. "You can't put that kind of magic on paper when you're designing a room," Hagan says.

Although Nancy had seen many drawings of the proposed renovation, she was thrilled by the transformation, marveling at how her brother and Hagan knit together three disparate floors into a cohesive whole. "I wasn't sure it was possible to make the space warm and livable," Nancy says. "It looks like a beautiful art museum, but it feels like a home." □



Right: A custom-made light fixture by Lindsey Adelman Studio hangs over the Victoria Hagan-designed dining table and Holly Hunt Studio chairs; the photographs are by Stephen Lee, and the rug was custom made by Beauvais Carpets.



Grafito marble walls and teak-slat flooring grace the master bath's shower; the fittings, including the flush-mounted rain-shower panel, are by Dornbracht.



DESIGN WISDOM

RECOGNIZE POTENTIAL: Stephen and Nancy were able to see promise in an apartment that at first seemed prohibitively problematic.

FORM SHOULD FOLLOW FUNCTION: Nancy's key mandate, to compose a living area that could double as a recital hall—complete with acoustic wall coverings—determined the layout of the entire apartment and set the tone for the design scheme.

CREATE DRAMA: The glass-lined entrance staircase adds an impressive visual element and makes for a theatrical entry into the performance/living space.

LOOK UP: Wood beams and ceiling panels not only camouflage the ventilation systems and acoustic tiles but also provide the minimalist spaces with warmth and contrast.

HIDE IN PLAIN SIGHT: Cleverly tucked away are plenty of places for Nancy's teenage children to hang out, including a golf-simulator room and a family area with a concealable TV.

LET THERE BE LIGHT: Natural materials and muted fabrics used throughout give the home an airiness that complements its bright Central Park views.

BEFORE



Top: The master bedroom—situated in the former kitchen space—features cabinetry and paneling made of bleached anigre. Victoria Hagan Home side tables topped with Mattaliano lamps flank the bed; the blanket is by Calvin Klein Home.