



Reset the balance

A Brooklyn townhouse's quiet makeover,
achieved using the work of local artisans

Words / Dominic Lutyens
Images / Matthew Williams



Originally built in 1892, this six-storey townhouse in the Park Slope area of Brooklyn was carved up into eight dingy apartments in the 1940s. Now, it has been transformed into a light-filled, five-bedroom home, a labour-intensive project initiated in 2015 and finally completed in 2020.

The handsome building is an A house – the term in the US for a home that stands at the end of a row. “Daylight comes in on three sides,” says Lyndsay Caleo Karol, who, together with her husband, Fitzhugh Karol, redesigned the house’s interior and renovated its exterior. She says that she “wanted natural light to flood the rooms,” something that has been achieved with the opening up of previously covered windows, discovered during the course of the renovation, a change that Caleo Karol says was one of the joys of the project, enabling her to coax much more daylight inside. The addition of several outdoor terraces, including one on a garage roof, another with a fireplace and tree canopy and a roof terrace, has helped to draw even more light into the interior.

For the couple, being near green spaces was almost as vital a consideration as maximising the daylight that would enter the house: the property sits near the 19th-century Prospect Park, which was laid out by landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, who also co-designed Central Park with Calvert Vaux. “The second most important element to us was closeness to nature,” says Caleo Karol.

Caleo Karol is the creative director of The Brooklyn Home Company (TBHCo), a family-run property developer, which oversaw the renovation. TBHCo likes to incorporate lots of hand-crafted elements into its projects, and, for this house, it tapped into Brooklyn’s extensive community of artisans to create an individual interior furnished with one-off pieces made from ceramic and wood, as well as art and vintage furniture. The pièce-de-résistance is a new staircase ascending a wide, spacious stairwell, its oak banister forming graceful loops. Described by Caleo Karol as a “ribbon staircase linking all levels,” it has unified a formerly bitty, compartmentalised interior in a pared-down, elegant way – and allows more daylight to permeate the house thanks to tall windows flanking the stairwell.

This monumental and sculptural intervention replaces an old staircase that hugged the wall. “The new staircase was made by a Polish man who had created staircases all his life,” says Caleo Karol. “He knew how to make it curve. It was beautifully engineered.” Thanks to the generous width of the stairwell, a hook at the top of the staircase can be lowered to hoik up deliveries or suitcases from the ground floor, much needed when there are six storeys.

The facade couldn’t be altered because the building is in a landmarked zone (the US term for a conservation area). “There were a lot of restrictions on what we could do with it. But I appreciated that strictness,” says Caleo Karol.

Facing page
Art by Tyler Hays hangs beside the fireplace in the living room on the first floor

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Soft neutrals in the ground-floor living room invite lazy lounging; the two bouclé chairs are by Jenni Kayne

“Something we kept coming back to was wanting to create an interior that felt like it could have been around for some years”



Facing page
In the study, original beams have been revealed and plastered, complementing chalky white walls

Above
The oak staircase, with its sinuous ribbon-like handrail, is the project's architectural pièce-de-résistance

“Every detail, from stained-glass elements to curved windows, needed to be kept intact.”

Internally, says Caleo Karol, there were no stunning original features – or “jewels”, as she puts it. “But something we kept coming back to was not wanting to create an interior that felt very 2020 but one that could have been around for some years,” she says. The interior of the building looked unloved when the couple first bought the house: “There was peeling swimming-pool-blue paint everywhere and uprooted tiles.” Now, the interior is uniformly white, which encourages the light to bounce around. Pale wood floors made from sustainable timber, installed throughout, have a similar reflective effect, yet add a degree of warmth.

Initially, the couple took on this project with a view to moving into it. But realising later that they were too attached to their existing home – a brownstone nearby – they decided against it. Despite appearing stripped-down and ultra-modern in some places, the house also features some elements that hint at tradition. “There are pretty ceiling mouldings in the bedroom – new, custom-made ones that replaced damaged ones,” says Caleo Karol. “We were able to reference mouldings in our own home to ensure they looked authentic.” In the bedroom there is a surprisingly theatrical four-poster bed with totemic columns, inspired by the work of sculptor Constantin Brancusi and carved by Fitzhugh Karol (a sculptor himself, and TBHCo’s artist in residence).

In the ground-floor living room, which has access to a garden, a suspended ceiling was removed to expose wooden beams, which were then covered with plaster to add texture. Adjoining this room is a book-filled study as well as the house’s guest rooms, while the staircase on this level descends to a laundry room, gym and wine cellar.

Complementing the house’s chalky white walls is a wealth of hand-crafted objects fashioned from natural materials. As well as carving the bed, Karol made the wooden sideboard in the living room, while the kitchen includes some ceramics by Brooklyn-based Nicholas Newcomb. The dining area, which is open plan to the kitchen, boasts a chandelier with stoneware shades by Philadelphia-based designer Natalie Page, wooden dining chairs with a raw, rustic quality from a local antique shop and a painting by artist Tyler Hays.

Perhaps warm minimalism best sums up the style of this economically furnished yet comfortable house. Its hand-made pieces, including an ecru rug from Brooklyn-based Breuckelen Berber, local purveyor of antique Moroccan rugs, inevitably soften the white spaces. While connecting to the neighbourhood through the views from its terraces, the house simultaneously provides an inward-looking retreat from city life. “It doesn’t compete with the noise outside,” says Caleo Karol. “It’s a space to come home to and reset, with the aid of soothing daylight and hand-crafted objects.”

Facing page
In the playroom,
the sofas double
as twin beds
for sleepovers





Facing page
Clockwise from top left: The boot room has a classic black-and-white tiled floor; a view out to the properties of Park Slope; an arched stable door echoes the cupboards in the boot room; wall-to-wall storage in the master bedroom suite

Above
Tall windows flanking the staircase help the light to flood between the floors

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The bed, with its totem-like posts, was carved by Fitzhugh Karol

