

# AD

## ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

A HOUSEBOAT  
ON THE SEINE

INSIDE  
AMERICA'S  
DESIGN  
COLLECTION

OUTDOOR  
ENTERTAINING  
ESSENTIALS

# NEXT WAVE

SUSTAINABLE LIVING  
FROM BROOKLYN TO KYOTO





# BOTH

# SIDES

# NOW

IN BROOKLYN, AN ADJOINING PAIR OF HISTORIC HOMES OFFER BOLD CASE STUDIES IN PRESERVATION, PASSIVE-HOUSE STRATEGIES, AND DESIGN DERRING-DO

TEXT BY **SAM COCHRAN**  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JASON SCHMIDT**

ENLISTED BY BROTHER-SISTER CLIENTS, GRT ARCHITECTS RESTORED TWO CIRCA 1840 GREEK REVIVAL TOWN HOUSES IN BROOKLYN. FIRM FOUNDERS RUSTAM MEHTA (LEFT) AND TAL SCHORI STAND IN THE RECONSTRUCTED ENTRIES. AD100 INTERIOR DESIGNER ADAM CHARLAP HYMAN, TAPPED BY THE BROTHER AND HIS WIFE TO DECORATE THEIR FAMILY'S SIDE, POSES IN THE WINDOW ABOVE.



A BESPOKE SOFA CLAD IN VOUTSA FABRIC ANCHORS THE BROTHER'S LIVING ROOM, OUTFITTED WITH A KATIE STOUT CHANDELIER AND SCONCES AND A SOPHIE STONE RUG; PAINTING BY DAICHI TAKAGI, COLUMN ILLUSTRATION BY GIOVANNI BATTISTA PIRANESI. OPPOSITE AN ANTIQUE WILLIAM ARTHUR SMITH BENSON LIGHT HANGS IN HIS FAMILY'S KITCHEN, WHERE CABINETRY NODS TO THE MENIL HOUSE; PHOTOGRAPH BY BUCK ELLISON, WATERCOLORS BY SUSAN CIANCIOLO.

ART: DAICHI TAKAGI/RAI MIKEN, GIOVANNI BATTISTA PIRANESI

ART: BUCK ELLISON, SUSAN CIANCIOLO.



It takes a moment to notice the hush. Inside two side-by-side Brooklyn town houses, dated to the 1840s and now revived according to Passive House strategies, you'll hear no din of ventilation systems, no noise from the streets. But while the atmosphere may be quiet, there is nothing muted about these homes—both outspoken design statements and bold case studies in energy-efficient construction.

Tal Schori and Rustam Mehta, childhood friends and founders of GRT Architects, first stepped foot inside them seven years ago at the behest of brother-sister clients, who purchased the residences as adjoining homes for their respective families. The decades had not been kind to the Greek Revival structures, which had changed hands multiple times, suffering

neglect, their ornament stripped. "They were falling apart," recalls Schori, enticed by the prospect of designing sibling structures for sibling owners. Add to that challenge historic façades subject to rigorous review and an ambitious sustainability mandate—a big job became more complicated still.

Working closely with master builders Mark Ellison and Adam Marelli, GRT restored the imperiled edifices (pouring new foundations, shoring up wood framing) while tailoring the interiors to the contemporary lives of two families. On the outside, that meant returning exterior ornament to its earliest known state, rebuilding shutters, lintels, cornices, clapboard, and more to match a circa 1940 photograph, with clever variations between the two addresses. "Our practice loves engaging with historic architecture," says Mehta, alluding to past projects such as the conversion of a Harlem rectory. "We wanted to do right by these buildings."



If the exteriors were constrained to faithful recreations, the interiors offered vessels for experimentation, with two-story volumes carved out of both homes, rear windows reconfigured or enlarged, and ceiling height added by raising the roof and digging into the basement. “On both sides we wanted to create spaces that felt full of light and air but were also sculpturally complex,” says Schori. All the while European Passive House standards—wherein a tightly sealed building envelope and specialized ventilation system slash the need for heating or cooling—guided the process. To maintain the historic façades, GRT tucked the necessary insulation along the inner walls, which in turn grew to as thick as 17 inches. “We thought of it as a quilted blanket,” says Schori, noting how they embraced this design inevitability by rounding the sills and jambs of the triple-glazed windows. “Softness became a defining feature and a link between both houses.”

Architecturally, they are now related but distinct. More orthogonal in spirit, the sister’s side features a central staircase and internal windows so that the primary suite overlooks the kitchen and dining area,

CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT THE BROTHER AND HIS WIFE’S PRIMARY SUITE FEATURES MILLWORK WITH NICHEs OF XENOMANIA TEXTILES; RUG BY SOPHIE STONE. VOUTSA WALLPAPER IN A TRAMP-ART MOTIF LINES THE DINING ROOM; TABLE BY FICUS INTERFAITH, ANTIQUE BIEDERMEIER CHAIRS, AND A CHARLAP HYMAN & HERRERO LANTERN PAINTED BY PILAR ALMON. A 19TH-CENTURY GUSTAV PRECHT MIRROR IN A POWDER ROOM.



“WE WANTED TO CREATE SPACES THAT FELT FULL OF LIGHT AND AIR BUT WERE ALSO SCULPTURALLY COMPLEX.” —TAL SCHORI

WITH ITS CONVERGING CURVES, THE STAIRCASE ON THE BROTHER’S SIDE WAS A FEAT OF FORM-MAKING AND CRAFTSMANSHIP EXECUTED WITH THE HELP OF MASTER BUILDERS MARK ELLISON AND ADAM MARELLI; PAINTING BY QUENTIN JAMES MCCAFFREY, PHOTOGRAPH BY RYAN MCGINLEY.

OUTFITTED WITH A CUSTOM VANITY BY GRT, THE PRIMARY BATHROOM OF THE BROTHER AND HIS WIFE FEATURES AN IMMERSIVE MURAL AND MOSAIC BY LUKAS GERONIMAS GINIOTIS INSPIRED BY BOB DYLAN'S SONG "TEMPEST."



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE COCOONED IN CARPETS, A BASEMENT SPACE ON THE BROTHER'S SIDE NODS TO RENZO MONGIARDINO. WALLPAPER BY ADELPHI PAPER HANGINGS AND CARPETING BY CODIMAT COLLECTION ENLIVEN HIS DAUGHTER'S ROOM. PAINTED IN BENJAMIN MOORE'S SEA ISLE, HIS SON'S ROOM FEATURES A FLOOR LAMP BY ARTIST OHAD MEROMI; CARPET BY CODIMAT COLLECTION, BEDDING BY HAY.

borrowing light from the rear façade. On the brother's side, meanwhile, stairs form a sculptural focal point that winds from the breakfast nook to the sinuous second-floor balcony, spiraling from there to define the primary suite on the top level before reaching the roof. (It's hard work, Schori says, "to create curves that effortless.") Discreet bulkheads, a concession from the architecture review board, allow for a shared deck.

Both sides make shrewd use of salvaged materials, repurposing wood from the homes' beams as flooring or treads and brick nogging as backyard pavers. But any similarities end when it comes to the decor. Whereas the sister and her wife furnished their rooms with the help of Revamp Interior Design, the brother and his wife tapped AD100 interior designer Adam Charlap Hyman to work his magic for them and their young daughter and son. "Our role was to thread the historical exterior with the interior, to confuse that relationship, to blend it," he reflects. "This blurriness of things from different time periods became the structure."





# V

Victorian furnishings, contemporaneous to the house's origins, helped burst the creative dam. "They wanted something that, although not a literal riff on that era, had a similar spirit of exuberance," says Charlap Hyman. In particular, light fixtures by William Arthur Smith Benson became "a fetish," find-

ing their way into the dining room, powder room, kitchen, and more, while also inspiring a complementary commission by Katie Stout for the living room. Notes Charlap Hyman: "Katie responded to the kitchen's historic chandelier proportionally and aesthetically to create a mismatched pair across time."

All around, singular treasures delight. Free-form rag rugs by the artist Sophie Stone swirl in the living room and primary suite. Bespoke Voutsas patterns appear as upholstery fabric on the statement sofa and wallpaper in the dining room, the latter an immersive homage to tramp art. There, a custom table by Ficus Interfaith bears terrazzo motifs of Brooklyn flora, inspiration echoed in a Charlap Hyman & Herrero lantern hand-painted by Pilar Almon (Charlap Hyman's mother). Elsewhere are homages to Madeleine Castaing, Robert Mallet-Stevens, and Renzo Mongiardino, among other titans of the past. Literature too served as touchpoints, from Edith Wharton novels to Gertrude Stein's 1914 book *Tender Buttons*. "It was a big project with many twists and turns—but it was fun," says Charlap Hyman. "These clients were super creative, super open-minded, and super adventurous, with a real appreciation for beauty and oddity and very special things with interesting histories."

Nowhere is that more clear than the couple's bathroom, where an immersive mural and mosaic by Lukas Geronimas Giniotis riffs on Bob Dylan's "Tempest," a tribute to the sinking *Titanic*, and a favorite tune of the free-spirited family. "This was a tour de force by all teams," says Charlap Hyman, reflecting on the creative and technical collaboration between designers, architects, builders, and artisans. At the end of the day, Schori reflects, "our mission was to create someplace totally unique for both families." ▲

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP BRICKS RECLAIMED FROM THE HOUSES' ORIGINAL NOGGING NOW SERVE AS PAVERS IN THE BACKYARD. ON THE SISTER'S SIDE, INTERNAL WINDOWS USHER LIGHT FROM THE REAR FAÇADE INTO THE PRIMARY SUITE. OPPOSITE GRT SALVAGED EXISTING JOISTS AS TREADS FOR THE SISTER AND HER FAMILY'S CENTRAL STAIRCASE, WHICH FEATURES WHITE-OAK HANDRAILS WITH PAINTED-STEEL BALUSTERS AT PERPENDICULAR ANGLES; CEILING LIGHTS BY ALEX DE WITTE (LEFT) AND LASVIT.



"OUR PRACTICE LOVES ENGAGING WITH HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE. WE WANTED TO DO RIGHT BY THESE BUILDINGS." —RUSTAM MEHTA