



# ARTISTS' RENDERING

A PASSION FOR STORIED OBJECTS INFORMS A HISTORIC  
TOWNHOUSE RENOVATION IN BOERUM HILL.

WRITTEN BY JENNIFER SERGENT / PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAUREN COLEMAN



ARCHITECTURE / MICHAEL SCHMITT  
AND MELANIE HOLLAS,  
MICHAEL SCHMITT ARCHITECT PC  
INTERIOR DESIGN / AMY LAU, AMY LAU DESIGN



Painted in Farrow & Ball's Stiffkey Blue, the front door opens to a colorful foyer. The vintage Anatolian rug is from ABC Carpet & Home and the custom floating console was fabricated by André Joyau and painted at Osmundo Studio.

B oerum Hill artist Stephen Sollins frequently works with old textiles—the quilts, tablecloths and samples that populate flea markets and eBay auctions. “I’m interested in domestic textiles that show traces of people’s use,” he notes. “I’m definitely drawn to objects that have a history. It’s the touch of a thousand hands that gives a great patina.”

Stephen and his partner, a writer, saw that same appeal in a 19<sup>th</sup>-century townhouse in Brooklyn that had undergone multiple renovations yet still retained many of its original architectural details. They enlisted designer Amy Lau, who had worked with them on previous homes, to enhance those details while letting in more natural light to illuminate their treasured artworks and collections.

“The second I walked in, I was like, ‘You have this huge opportunity,’” recalls the designer. “We wanted it to feel loftier and more open.” As part of a whole-house renovation, Lau collaborated with architect Michael Schmitt and project architect Melanie Hollas, adding large glass openings across the rear façades of the lower floors. On the parlor level, dividing walls were removed entirely so that sunlight would permeate all the way from the lush, newly enclosed backyard to the tall, street-facing windows.







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In the whitewashed living room, a pair of Mongolian fur armchairs by Franco Albini with Franca Helg for Cassina provide an optimal perch for enjoying the room's artwork. The pitcher atop the mantle is an original 1950s Pablo Picasso for Madoura and the painting above is a rare Jasper Johns.

Lau was particularly inspired by Amsterdam's old row houses for the design, specifying bright, white gallery walls with dark, contrasting flooring throughout the home's four levels. "I wanted it to look like everything was really grounded—that's why the darker color was chosen," she says. "I don't know how many colors I tested until I got it just right." That new architectural envelope elevates the home's original trim and moldings, marble fireplaces and freshly exposed ceiling beams. "We kept anything of intrinsic value that pertained to historical references, and we stuck to that vernacular throughout," Lau explains.


The couple added choice architectural references of their own, too: Every interior door—11 in total—is a salvaged, old-growth cypress door from New Orleans, where the couple used to live. "It's quite common in New Orleans to see a house with raw, salvaged antique doors, and we loved that," Stephen says. "So when it was time to outfit this house, we coordinated measurements with what our friends could find down there. It took a few Saturdays of hunting around." Next, he spent many sessions online sourcing black porcelain knobs, hardware and hinges. "I ended up buying four times as much as I needed, just to get the right parts," he admits.

Taking his clients' lead with the interior doors, Schmitt stripped and retained many of the home's original features, like the enormous wood moldings around the parlor floor windows. "We only left the original stuff exposed," says the architect. "If it was a new detail, it was painted. You have to find a medium between perfectly redone and raw, as that approach brings out the soul of the space."





With its timeworn architectural grounding established, Lau then furnished the home to align with her clients' collections, which include works by Jasper Johns, Richard Tuttle and Jenny Holzer, along with vintage textiles, sets of Depression glass and inherited majolica dishware. "They both love and appreciate warm modernism—that's where the balance is," Lau says of her client's well-articulated tastes. Walking that line between antique and contemporary, she chose sculptural Serge Mouille lighting, midcentury pieces by Charlotte Perriand and Jean Prouvé, and other furnishings that invoke the French craftsmanship of the 1940s and '50s. But there is one starkly modern contribution that seems to float within the historic parlor's walls: The sleek white lacquer and walnut modular kitchen that Lau and Schmitt

designed and Brooklyn millworker Joseph Fino fabricated. "We built mockups of that volume with two-by-fours and paper to decide the height, width and depth," Schmitt says. Adds Lau, "It serves as a room divider where the light can still pour in." While the clever partition houses the kitchen's appliances on one side, the other softly defines the living room—and features a piece by the homeowner himself. That artwork, along with one in the master bedroom, comes from Stephen's 2002-2004 "Elegy" series, which translates the stitching of sentimental vintage embroidery into an entirely new language. One might argue that the same could be said of this renovation for his family of four. "We kept as many original details as we could," Lau notes, "and then we modernized." 

In the cozy upstairs family room, Lau collaborated with André Joyau to design and fabricate bookcases framed in steel with free-edge walnut shelves. The sofa is by Antonio Citterio for Flexform and the 1950s Caviuna rosewood coffee table is by Giuseppe Scapinelli through 1stdibs.

Lau chose black accents, such as a pendant light by Kalmar Werkstätten from The Future Perfect in the family room, to complement the vintage black doorknobs and hardware her client sourced for his salvaged antique doors.





**Right:** Tucked behind the floating kitchen wall, the open-concept dining area features Jean Prouvé's SR side chairs and Fauteuil Direction host chairs—all with Japanese red-lacquer bases—surrounding a re-edition of Prouvé's walnut-topped Elm table.

**Opposite:** Lau designed two vitrine cases—also fabricated by André Joyau—to resemble storefront windows that display the owners' heirloom collections of Depression glass and majolica porcelain dishware.



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**Above:** Artist Deborah Kass—a friend and neighbor of the couple—painted *Gold Barbra*, a focal point of the master bedroom. The fireplace surround, like others throughout the house, was refurbished by Wild English Stoneworks in Brooklyn.

**Right:** Homeowner Stephen Sollins' own *Horse and Rider* artwork hangs over a walnut 640 Atlantico bed from De La Espada, which is accented by custom linen pillows by Coral & Tusk and a heavy bouclé throw from Homenature. The drapery, fabricated by Erik Bruce, is Berber Indigo Striae embroidered linen, also by Coral & Tusk.

