

Michael Strauss and Dorothy Hom transform a commercial building in the West Village into

a gracious Manhattan townhouse. **HOME COOKED**

DESIGNED BY MICHAEL J. STRAUSS AND DOROTHY Hom of MSDH (a partnership affiliated with Vanguard Construction and Development Co.), the building in Manhattan's far West Village attracted attention even before it was complete. While the house was under construction, the clients – a working couple with a child – wrapped the façade with a gray construction shed emblazoned with three painted orange Chinese characters. Most of the neighbors assumed a swank new Asian eatery was on the way, but those who knew Chinese were probably less certain of what was coming. The characters read, simply, "I love you."

Clearly a great deal of love, ambition, and craft has gone into making this home. Formerly a four-story commercial building, the 8,000-sq.-ft. structure was substantially altered to transform it into a five-story, mixed-use building with a triplex residence atop a three-bedroom apartment on the second floor, and commercial space at ground level.

Right: The renovated building presents a striking façade of stucco with anodized aluminum reveals. MSDH retained the three-bay organization of the commercial ground floor and second-story apartment, while allowing the upper stories more independent expression.

STUCCO: **CONCORD RESTORATION**. ANODIZED ALUMINUM REVEALS: **PITCON**. CURTAIN WALL SYSTEM: **KAWNEER**. EXTERIOR LIGHTING: **BEGA**. RAILINGS: **COORDINATED METAL INC.** SIGNAGE: **KALTECH**.

Opposite: The double-height living room houses a well-chosen collection of contemporary Italian and Asian furnishings. The coffee table is polished cast concrete atop a cherry base.

WENGE FLOORING: **PEISER**. LIGHTING: **MODULAR**. SLIPPER CHAIRS AND OTTOMANS: **SALON MODERNE**. CARPET: **TEX STYLE**. SOFA, CHAIRS AND DESK: **B&B ITALIA**. TED BOERNER TABLE: **DENNIS MILLER ASSOCIATES**. PAINT: **DONALD KAUFMANN COLOR COLLECTION**.

PHOTOGRAPHY: PAUL WARCHOL







Because of zoning restrictions, the fifth floor could not be added to the building unless existing floor area was removed. By cutting back the rear of the second story and the front of the fourth story, the owners gained the right to add the additional floor while also gaining a deck for the second-floor apartment. Moreover, the third, fourth, and fifth levels were extended on the back to create a set of stepped terraces. The entire renovation—inclusive of design, building mass, front and rear facades, decks and interiors – took 16 months to complete.

The owners enter the triplex with a direct elevator that opens onto a private foyer. This room in turn leads to a spectacular living

Above: The foyer offers a gracious transition from street to residence. The stair to the left connects with the building's main stairwell. Walls in and around the vestibule were given exceptional finishes, including the dramatic orange wall, finished in textured faux shagreen.

ALTAR TABLE: **LEEKAN DESIGNS**. LAMP: **GEOMANCY**.
ORANGE FAUX SHAGREEN FINISH: **FRESCO**.

Opposite: The cantilevered stair to the upper floors is veiled behind fluted glass. In the living room, the designers moved the fireplace to make a black, recessed niche that reflects candlelight.

CUSTOM STAIR TREADS: **NAMDAN**. CUSTOM STAIR STEEL: **NEWCO IRON WORKS**. GLASS: **BENDHEIM**. STAIR WALL STEEL FRAME AND HANDRAILS: **ROLLER ARCHITECTURAL METALS**. CANDLES: **CALVIN KLEIN HOME COLLECTION**. MANTEL: **COORDINATED METAL, INC.**







room that is approximately a twenty-foot cube, with a corner window looking directly down West 13th and West 4th Streets, and an expansive curtain wall that takes in the West Village and the towers of lower Manhattan. Off the vestibule are a powder room, dining room, an eat-in kitchen, and a deck. From the vestibule, a stairwell leads to the next level, where the study, guest bedroom, child's room and bathroom, and mezzanine library are situated. One flight up are the master bedroom, bath and walk-in closet as well as a large terrace on the front that serves as a rather serious rose garden.

Surfaces have been treated with extraordinary care. Wenge floors were installed in the living, dining, and stair areas, with stone flooring in the kitchen and bathrooms. Other woods used throughout the project include cerused English chestnut, ribbon mahogany, and white-washed oak. All the cabinetry in the residence was custom-designed. Special finishes were used generously in and around the vestibule, including gold leaf, faux shagreen, crackle and "Armourcoat" polished encaustic finishes. The dining room was intended, in the designer's words, to "capture a Jean-Michel Frank elegance" through the use of wood paneling and indirect cove lighting.

"We tried to create a gracious environment," Strauss explains, "because our clients want to live a gracious, urban life." Key to this notion of gracious living is a room-based organization of space that clearly delineates public, semi-private, and private zones, with generous transition spaces in-between. The furniture, selected by Dorothy Hom, expresses the clients' interest in antique Asian and contemporary Italian design, hence the fusion of Eastern and Western finishes and objects.

Left: The staircase provides a view into the living room and its orange glass window.

Opposite: the enclosed dining room was finished in cerused English chestnut with oiled, cold-rolled steel picture rails. Lighting, sound and ventilation systems are fully integrated into the ceiling.

CHAIRS: **HOLLY HUNT**. TABLE: **SALON MODERNE**. FRAMES: **JOHN ESTY**. MILLWORK: **NAMDAN**. VENEER: **BACON VENEERS**.



Above: The master bedroom is an intimate retreat on the top level of the triplex, although its design sensibility is consistent with the house's public areas. The headboard is white-washed oak with wenge reveals.

HEADBOARD AND NIGHT TABLES: **NAMDAN**. CHRISTIAN LIAIGRE BENCH: **HOLLY HUNT**. CURTAIN FABRIC: **POLLACK & ASSOCIATES**. SCONCES: **NESSEN**. BEDDING: **TAKASHIMAYA**. CARPET: **ATLAS MILLS**. BUREAU: **B&B ITALIA**.

Opposite: Terraces spill from the master bedroom balcony down to the deck off the kitchen. The designers were inspired to use Cor-ten steel planters after visiting the Getty Center garden, designed by Robert Irwin.

EXTERIOR PAVERS: **HANOVER ARCHITECTURAL PRODUCTS**. ALUMINUM EXTERIOR BEAMS AND LINTELS: **ALL CITY**. EXTERIOR BEAMS AND LINTELS: **NEWCO IRON WORKS**. GARAGE DOOR: **ARM-R-LITE**. LIGHTING CONSULTANT: **ANN SCHIFFERS**. STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: **AVISHAY I. MAJOR, P.E.**. MECHANICAL ENGINEER: **MARTIN HABER ASSOCIATES**. CODE: **ZENREICH ARCHITECTS**. AV CONSULTANT: **BARAD AUDIO**. SECURITY: **CRAFTSMAN**. CONSTRUCTION MANAGER: **VANGUARD CONSTRUCTION & DEVELOPMENT CO., INC.**

Like a rich stock, the house gathers and condenses numerous allusions to the history of Modern architecture. The façade evokes certain experiments of Le Corbusier and Adolf Loos, with hints of the Maison de Verre by Pierre Chareau. The Maison de Verre reference continues in the living room, with the organization of the volume, the mezzanine library, and the stairwell details. If Strauss and Hom nod to Jean-Michel Frank in the design of the dining room, it is also clear that Adolf Loos's spirit was close at hand. MSDH further acknowledges a debt to Carlo Scarpa for his attention to material, craft and detail, especially in the design of the custom metalwork.

Strauss and Hom's design knowingly refers to certain contemporary artworks as well. A tall, recessed light trough along the main stairwell recalls the light sculptures of James Turrell. Cor-ten steel planters on the terrace were inspired by a visit to Robert Irwin's Getty Center Garden. And the ribbed glass plane separating the stairwell from the living room was intended to capture "the effect of Duchamps's nude moving up or down the stairs." Overall, the designers display a tectonic reach that one does not often see, and a deft hand that aims to fuse multiple elements into a harmonious whole.

– Henry Urbach

