

WHERE
EXCEPTIONAL
TASTE LIVES

VERANDA

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Evening Magic

HOW LIGHTING
CHANGES
EVERYTHING



WRITTEN



in the STARS



In New York, **Michael S. Smith** and **Andrew Oyen** build a new narrative for a 19th-century town house—with a little help from the cosmos.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: A Harold Ancart tree painting adds a whimsical “window” in the parlor. A Bridgewater sofa (Jasper) and skirted armchair (fabric, Robert Kime) cozy up to a modern waterfall coffee table. ♦ “The house has so many layers of floors, I wanted a sunny entry,” Smith says. The striped wallpaper and colorful stair runner draw the eye—and mood—upward. Lantern, Charles Edwards. ♦ Nineteenth-century town houses often featured “tea porches” where ladies would host elegant afternoon gatherings, says Oyen, who re-created the concept with a dining room overlooking the back garden.

PREVIOUS SPREAD, FROM LEFT: The library’s walls and cabinetry are finished in layers of duck-egg-blue glazes. Irish library table, Sutter Antiques. Artwork, Barbara Kruger. ♦ In the kitchen, the solar system is emblazoned on hand-painted backsplash tiles.



FOR PARENTS OF SMALL CHILDREN, the idea of waking up in the city that never sleeps takes on a whole new meaning. But one Manhattan family may have found a clever way to lean into the dreamtime disarray: Their newly renovated home is as beguiling as a bedtime story. “It’s this very Mary Poppins version of a town house,” says legendary designer Michael S. Smith, who oversaw the redesign.

Smith, who teamed up with architect Andrew Oyen of Ferguson & Shamamian Architects for this project, is known for referring to books and films when discussing his work (he also cited Henry James and *The Alienist* here). And like the best storybooks, this project is smart enough to satisfy grown-ups while also delighting kids. Grounded in historical authenticity, it’s sprinkled with adventure and magic: Animals, plants, and flowers frolic among maps, moons, and stars.

It makes sense that Smith, whose projects have included the Obama White House and properties for Shonda Rhimes, would tap

into a warmhearted vibe for these clients. He has known the husband since he was five years old, having decorated numerous residences for his parents and even participating in his wedding. Smith also designed the first apartment that the client, a financier, lived in with his wife, a journalist and scholar of the cosmos.

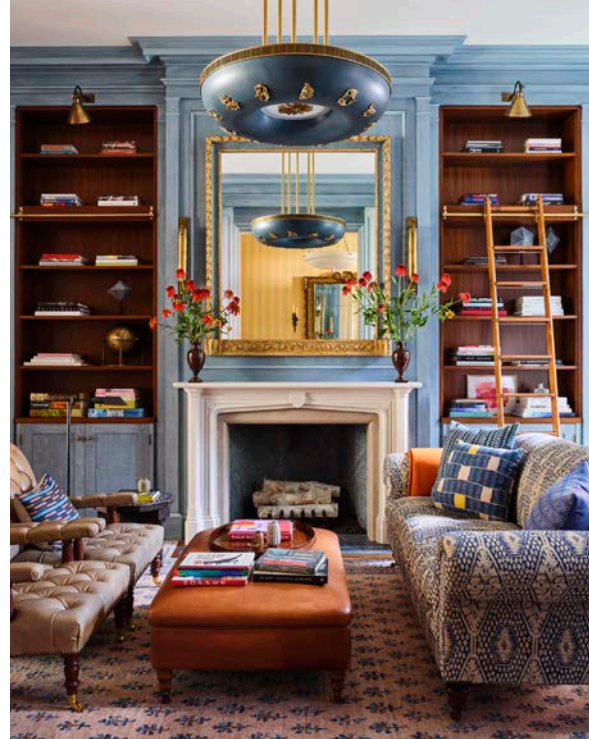
This project marks a new episode in the couple’s lives, given that they are now parents to three young children. “Town houses are great for families,” Oyen says. “People can be separated on different floors, yet there’s plenty of room for running around or coming together.” By the time the family acquired this house, however, much of its greatness had been stripped away. Built in the 19th century in the Italianate style, it had been gutted and shoddily renovated over the decades. The first step was to restore its grandeur and glory.

Oyen’s team found just a single original molding in the entire five-story house, then did extensive historical research. “From that, we built a whole vocabulary for the project,” he says, including handsome oak doors, a “tea porch”-style dining room, and a cast-iron fence and Juliet balcony out front that he commissioned from a foundry in



Brooklyn that re-created their 19th-century spirit. He also reintroduced an abundance of historic-inspired moldings to every room. His original scheme had specified simpler profiles, but the wife has what Smith calls “very romantic tastes.” So the moldings became more detailed, pilasters were added, and the ceilings sprouted medallions. Small rooms and passageways were seamlessly married to expansive spaces, bringing light and air into the interiors.

Smith outfitted the rooms in garden-party patterns and colors: stripes, damasks, batiks, and flowers in sunlit yellows, pinks, mints, and blues. “Flowers have an emotional charge,” he says. “They’re compelling, like candy.” And as with candy, it’s wise to balance their burst of energy, so Smith opted for florals that appear “washed and worn,” such as the rosy Indian-inspired floral stripe on the parlor armchair and the Bursa Printed Linen curtains in the library by Vaughan. Soft patterns also ripple across richly grained wood and marble surfaces, and are echoed in rugs both antique and contemporary. The effect is a kind of gentle busyness in which toys and books don’t look out of place. “The visuals support the chaos,” Smith says.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: “It’s a ship, a tree house, a sleigh,” says Smith of the custom bed with roll-up shades and a ladder entry in the boys’ bedroom. ♦ A 19th-century Italian mirror hangs above the library’s carved stone mantel (Jamb). Ottoman, Hollywood at Home. ♦ A 1920s Murano chandelier crowns the wife’s dressing room. French vanity chair, Brownrigg. ♦ An Alex Katz still life overlooks the breakfast nook. Table, Soane. Sconce, Collier Webb. **OPPOSITE:** Smith summons eternal spring in the primary bedroom with a vibrant green Chinese garden-inspired Gracie wallcovering.





Adding its own clear note to this harmony is the client's growing collection of contemporary art. "He's become a serious collector," Smith says. Yet the house was never envisioned as backdrop or gallery. "The idea was that the interiors would be flexible enough to accommodate anything. If a work of art is beautiful and has visual integrity, it coexists. And then maybe you buy a vase that picks up the green of a painting."

Throughout the rooms, tradition creates a comforting canvas for novelty and wonder—and for a smattering of references to the wife's interest in astronomy. "Space motifs are subtle but present," Smith says. The library, with its old-school paneling and custom cabinetry, is illuminated by a remarkable pendant bearing zodiac figures. A backsplash of hand-painted tiles in the kitchen depicts the solar system. And in the boys' bedroom, a custom-built bed offers the delicious privacy of a tree house, while starry wallpaper inspires the imagination.

ABOVE: The rooftop garden's lattice walls, along with the curlicue pattern on metal seating (Century Furniture), riff on the interior's Italianate motifs. Stripe cushion fabric, Perennials. **INSET:** A ladder-back bench (Andrew Crace) offers a quiet respite in the verdant courtyard. **OPPOSITE:** On the top floor of the town house, the wife's study is brightened by a row of clerestory lights that peek at the rooftop garden above. Wallcovering, Madeaux. Sconces, Vaughan.

It's been said that humans love stories because they bring structure to life's seemingly random sequence of experiences. Maybe we love houses for a similar reason—they organize space into meaningful patterns, where each room has a purpose, and familiarity creates a safe foundation for adventure. In a city as distracting and frenetic as New York, perhaps there's no greater luxury for a young family than a house that's grounding, like a familiar bedtime story—with a lifetime full of chapters still waiting to be written. ♦

