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Cindy Crawford



Our cover mixes pieces from our High room and our Low room p. 41

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SoHo Chic

Sophisticated new owners hired designer Laura Kirar to turn their builder's spec loft in downtown *Manhattan* into a user-friendly pied-à-terre with deco-inspired modern furnishings.



This page: In the living area, designer Laura Kirar concealed a wall of storage and utility spaces behind flush, cerused-oak plywood doors, reducing visual clutter and adding warmth. The sectional is by Douglas Levine for Bright Chair. Opposite: Kirar replaced the mantel with a patinated bronze surround, then blended clean-lined furnishings with organic forms like the teak-root coffee table from Chista. The leather *Muji* lounge chair and *Lattice* carpet are Kirar designs for Baker.







Developers' spec buildings usually deliver white-box apartments that are little more than blank slates for designers. But because their decisions are based

primarily on bottom-line expediency, developers are less successful at design details, which are often poorly considered and generic. In the case of this 2,700-square-foot bi-level space in SoHo, that meant a standard-issue "industrial" steel-and-cable banister and a cluttered feature wall in the living/dining space.

Said wall, the first sight greeting visitors upon exiting the elevator, was a mess, recalls Laura Kirar, who was hired to redesign the interiors by the unit's first owners, a Connecticut couple with two teenage daughters. "It was littered with doors for a breaker box, trash chute, HVAC system and a closet, as well as the most unattractive gas fireplace I've ever seen," she says.

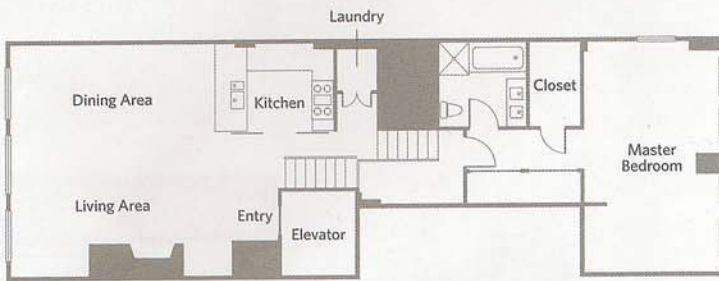
Despite its flaws, the apartment had a few great selling points, including two large banks of windows (an east-facing bank in the main living area and a west-facing one in the private quarters) with unobstructed views. The western end of the apartment was

divided into two floors, with the kids' area below and the master suite above. "The split level," says the wife, "changes the way it feels. Because the kids can go hang out in their room or watch a movie in the den, it feels more like a house."

Her husband, an IT executive for an investment bank in the city, needed an in-town base during the week. Additionally, the new pied-à-terre serves for family weekend visits to New York and as a place to host the couple's considerable extended family.

This page (from left): Beside a small library in the hallway, Kirar replaced a steel-and-cable banister with a sheet of glass; resin panels from 3form enclose the kitchen, creating what Kirar calls a "light cube." Opposite: Kirar sits in the dining area, where Alon Langotsky's salt painting is a dramatic backdrop for a 1950s Paul Frankl cork and iron dining table, four vintage Niels Moller rosewood chairs and a pair of Vienna chairs by Kirar for Baker (sculpture by Curtis Jere).

PRODUCED BY LINDA O'KEEFE. PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER MURDOCK.
WRITTEN BY JORGE S. ARANGO.



What the Pros Know

To bring warmth to the plain-Jane master bedroom, Kirar wrapped the space in rich walnut millwork and carried the material through to the custom nightstands and the trim on the custom headboard. This move had the added advantage of increasing storage capacity enough so that a clumsy second closet that jutted into the room (a Jeri Ledbetter painting, which can be seen in the photo at right, marks the spot where the closet once stood) could be removed,

thus opening up the relatively modest space and making it feel more luxurious. The owners took advantage of new shelving to exhibit their growing collection of ceramics, and the expanded area also enabled the creation of a comfortable lounge, now outfitted with a custom oversize ottoman and two lounge chairs: "The millwork makes the room unique and gives it more of a personality," says the happy client. The bamboo sculpture on the pedestal is by Honda Syoryu.



Kirar and her colleague (Richard Frazier, her husband) tackled the unsightly utility wall by paneling it in a "quiet surface," a furniture-grade cerused oak plywood stained a "lovely gray-green tone,"

Kirar explains. The open kitchen, which the designer felt countered the sophistication of the main room, was problematic. She and the wife wanted to enclose it, but the husband wasn't sure. "He thought that if we closed it off, the apartment would lose its loft feeling," says the wife, who eventually invoked a "spousal override."

Kirar's solution, however, won over the husband. To "avoid creating another small, heavy space," explains the designer, she devised a "light cube," using translucent resin panels that slide open on two sides, "so the couple has the flexibility to speak to guests while cooking and then to make the mess disappear."

As for art and furnishings, the approach was to "curate a collection," says the wife. The theme? Timeless and organic. "It really was about the forms being natural and soft without being brown and crunchy," observes Kirar. "We were able to invest in some midcentury-modern pieces to complement designs from my Baker collection." The former include a spectacular Paul Frankl dining table and, in the master bedroom, two French 1950s armchairs. From Baker came seating, rugs and accessories.

"I'm proud that it's so user-friendly," says the wife. "It's better than my house in the way it works for us." ▣

See Resources, last pages.

This page (from left): The master bath, including its Grohe fixtures, stayed as it was. In a purpose-built, loftlike building, "I knew the kitchen and bathrooms would be done," says the wife. The master bedroom lounge, lit by reproduction Serge Mouille floor lamps from Guéridon, has '50s French chairs and an ottoman by TRU Design. Opposite: The master bedroom features walnut millwork and a room-wide upholstered headboard under art by Sarah Davis.



