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VICENTE WOLF
MIXES IT UP IN A
HAMPTONS
KITCHEN, P.98



neutral territory

In a duplex loft in **Manhattan**, designer Francine Gardner used unusual accessories to give earth-toned rooms plenty of personality.

For one corner of the living room, Francine Gardner chose polished palm trunks from Indonesia as a dark, organic contrast to a refined daybed from Henry Becc's Modénature collection. Opposite: For the 2,100-square-foot roof deck, she selected substantial pieces from Janus et Cie's Dedon collection to echo the strong lines of the steel beams overhead. Landscape designer Scott Ahlborn used ornamental grasses and bamboo for privacy and softness.



“I’m not a color person,” says New York City interior designer Francine Gardner. “I prefer neutrals—tans, white, beiges and browns.”

Fortunately, the owner of this duplex loft in SoHo, an investment banker who bought the place as a bachelor two years ago and recently married, feels exactly the same way. And so, while he wanted his home to be one-of-a-kind, he told Gardner when he hired her, its personality should come from form and texture, not color and clutter.

“Rather than make color the central focus, as it is in many apartments,” he says, “I wanted the space and the pieces themselves to be the focal point.”

To accommodate that desire, Gardner chose pieces with stand-out shapes and materials, juxtaposing hard edges with soft curves, natural materials with manmade ones. “The palette is neutral,” says the designer, “but it is very warm, and I introduced beautiful rich woods to break the modernity.” Refined custom built-ins play against the pronounced grain of the wide-plank flooring.

In the living room, floor lamps designed by José Esteves for Interieurs, Gardner’s TriBeCa store, marry the curvilinear form of a traditional brass chandelier with the industrial edge of an aluminum mesh lampshade. Window treatments are simple but gauzy, for a softer modern look. And one-of-a-kind undulating benches from France (made of kamagong, a hard, dense fruitwood found only in the Philippines) offer textural contrast to cushy sofas and chairs that are upholstered in cream and brown, respectively.

“The living room is the first thing you see when you walk into the apartment,” says Gardner, “so I wanted to make the contrast a bit more dramatic than it is in other parts of the home.”

To accentuate the living room’s soaring ceilings, the designer chose tall furniture, like the custom-made oak media-storage armoire to the left of the fireplace. A sedate group of sofas and chairs, all from the Modè-nature collection, sit on a handwoven *Pinstripe* rug from Carini Lang. Her client, a music and movie lover, requested large flat-screen TVs in the living room, media room and master bedroom.

PRODUCED BY LINDA O’KEEFFE. PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL GRIMM.
WRITTEN BY SUSAN KLEINMAN.









Ln the master bedroom, Gardner stuck to an almost monochromatic palette, creating drama and interest with a wide variety of textiles and textures, including custom hand-loomed coverlets and pillows, all of which the client not only saw but felt before approving them. "Having him touch every single fabric sample was a very important part of the process," says Gardner, "because the way a person responds to different textures is visceral, and very individual."

The custom-designed upholstered bed is set against an expanse of solid oak. "For a different client, I might have done a huge four-poster bed in here to take advantage of the height," says Gardner, "but this man is not a four-poster kind of person. You have to understand who your client is and design for him."

Designing for this particular client meant placing a flat-screen TV right across from the bed and accommodating some serious stereo speakers, as well as finding a desk that was comfortable but did not overpower the space, because the homeowner chose not to convert any of the apartment's three other bedrooms into a home office. Gardner gave a Modénature *Arche* desk a custom finish and paired it with a suede-covered *Charlotte* bridge chair from the same line.

"Having extra bedrooms will allow for future family," says the newlywed, "and for now, it gives us room for visitors. And when you close the door to the master bedroom, it becomes its own studio apartment, a smaller, intimate space within a larger apartment."

Clockwise from top left: A small desk in the master bedroom; under the open stairs are three Joe Conforti raku pottery wall sculptures; custom dining tables can be moved together or apart. Opposite: In the master bedroom, an enormous oak headboard echoes the wide-plank flooring, but deeply textured bedding and soft fabrics (like the cashmere upholstery on the bench) add sensuousness.



although he appreciates the intimacy of the master suite, the homeowner also wanted some larger spaces in which he could entertain—both indoors and out. With this in mind, Gardner turned the entire top floor of the duplex into a comfortable media room, with a *Sydney* sofa from First Time, a bar and an open space in which her client can play his collection of electric guitars.

“Francine and I spent a lot of time discussing how I would use the space,” he says. “And as a result, the floor plan really matches the way my wife and I now live.”

Beyond sliding glass doors, the rooftop deck has already been the site of several large parties, and sees frequent dinners à deux.

“A lot of New Yorkers have terraces but never use them,” says Gardner. “An important part of this project was understanding that this homeowner really did want to use this space.”

To accommodate him as stylishly and comfortably as possible,

she chose all-weather seating in geometric forms that echo the lines of the dramatic steel beams just in sight of the deck. And while high-quality outdoor fabrics are now available in colors and patterns galore, Gardner stuck with natural canvas cushions so that the skyline and the surroundings could take center stage, as the homeowner wished.

“I like the large space that opens to the sky,” he says, “but without the typical cityscape views. You are transported to another place when you are there. You know the city is there, but you can forget about it, too.”

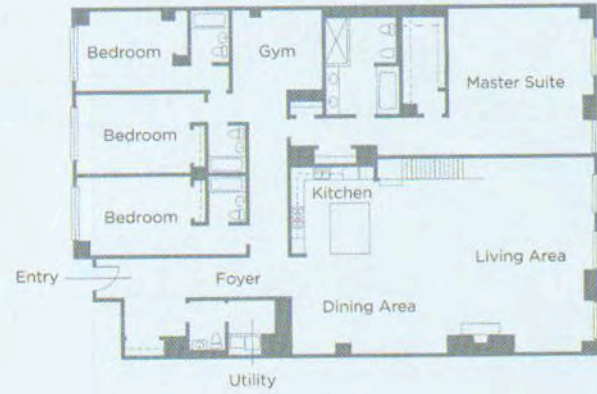
See *Resources, last pages.*

A ledge above the sectional in the upstairs media room, the home’s indoor party room, serves as a gallery for art photographs (the cocktail table was designed just for this space). Opposite: On the adjacent roof deck, Gardner built a dining pavilion of ipe wood. “It had to be sturdy,” she says, “not only to match the scale of the steel beams but also because it can get very windy up here.”



What the Pros Know

Personal style is not all about accessories. While conventional wisdom holds that the best way to personalize a space is with lots of mementos, Francine Gardner, whose personal aesthetic embodies sophisticated restraint, prefers to take another tack: "When you have too many things around," she suggests, "you never really notice any of them. I much prefer to edit down until there are just a few—very few—objects that are really beautiful and special for the homeowner." While Gardner shops for objects and art all over the world, she will sell a client only something that he or she is absolutely excited about. "If not," she says, "I put it in my store, so that it can go home with someone who will really feel a personal connection." She looks for that same visceral connection to textures and fabrics, attempting to identify individual tactile as well as visual preferences. "To really make this space personal for my client," she says, "I had him touch every fabric, every finish and every piece of furniture, to see how he responded to it."



Main Floor

