

Step Inside Ashley Stark's Transformed Upper East Side Abode

During the head-to-toe renovation of her Manhattan town house, textile scion Ashley Stark Kenner loved bringing her work home

By Hannah Martin

Photography by Douglas Friedman

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“We’ll just fix it up a little bit.”

That’s what Ashley Stark Kenner thought when she and husband Nick, founder and CEO of Just Salad, bought a town house on New York’s Upper East Side to make room for their growing family. The landmarked 19th-century building had a lot going for it—generous dimensions, a deep backyard, and, a rarity among town houses, lots of light. But at their first meeting with New York-based Lichten Architects, talk quickly shifted to “gut renovation.”

“The façade was the only thing that stayed,” Kenner says now, three years later. “For a while, we didn’t have a roof. We didn’t have a floor. We dug out the basement, we added a top floor, we added terraces. If I showed you the before and after, you’d be like, ‘What?’”



In the living room of Ashley Stark Kenner’s Manhattan home, 1957 Pierre Jeanneret chairs and a custom sofa surround a Kelvin LaVerne cocktail table. Artworks by Julian Schnabel, Brent Wadden, and Damien Hirst. © 2020 Julian Schnabel / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved / DACS, London / ARS, NY 2020 Douglas Friedman



Jansen chairs pull up to a custom oak dining table surrounded by faux bois wallpaper by [Holland & Sherry](#). Serge Mouille chandelier; mirrors from [Newel](#); painting by Beverly Fishman. Douglas Friedman

As the senior vice president of design and creative director at the eight-decades-old textile titan Stark, she knew exactly what she wanted. And with a totally clean slate, she didn’t have to compromise. “I had a vision, and I stuck with it,” says Kenner, calling her aesthetic “laid-back, organic, beachy, a little bit French.”

Working closely with Kenner, architects Andrew Friedman and Kevin Lichten created a floor plan that functioned for family life and, as Friedman explains, “felt loftlike and modern but still like a traditional town house.” That sensibility extended to the decor, spearheaded by New York firm Aman & Meeks (with a heavy hand from Kenner herself).

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Artworks by Donald Baechler (above Desk) and Takashi Murakami (above Shearling-Covered Armchair) mix with an RH baby & child desk and chair and a chandelier from CB2 in the daughter's room. © 2020 Donald Baechler / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
Douglas Friedman



The son's custom bed, covered in a [Holland & Sherry](#) linen, flanked by [Karl Springer](#) lamps
Douglas Friedman

"Ashley grew up in this business," says James Aman. He and John Meeks have known her for more than a decade, having designed her first city apartment, before she was married. "Not only does she have an innate sense of style herself but she gets it, she understands it, she knows how to be current while staying classic."

Kenner's crystal-clear vision was ground-up, starting with the floors. Once the bones were rebuilt, there was Kenner, eight months pregnant with her third child, sifting through oak floorboards with Friedman. After months of searching for the perfect wood, she had finally found some reclaimed oak through LV Wood (a recommendation from her friend Nate Berkus) that resonated, and she hand-selected and placed each board into a chevron pattern. When it came time to lay the bathroom floors with marble from Artistic Tile, it was a similar scene. Kenner combed through boxes of tiles, selecting pieces with only the subtlest veining.



In the kitchen, painted [Benjamin Moore](#) Decorator's White, the appliances are by [Gaggenau](#), sink by [Dornbracht](#), and chairs from [Mecox](#). Douglas Friedman

Rooms were assembled around her requests. Pierre Jeanneret’s iconic Chandigarh chairs were, as Meeks recalls, “on her bucket list,” and the rest of the living room came together around a pair scored via 1stdibs. Her idea for a wraparound sectional, modeled after a vintage Knoll piece, and a custom-made bookcase set the cozy tone in the den. And Gracie worked with her on a custom wallpaper for the powder room with a particular “distressed denim-blue” ground.

Much of the decor is custom made, mixing in with a thoughtful collection of vintage and antiques. A bespoke Vladimir Kagan–inspired sofa in the living room curves around the Kelvin LaVerne cocktail table Kenner brought with her from her last place. A cerused-oak vanity was constructed for her dressing room. And Jansen dining chairs gather around a bronze-inlaid oak farm table in the dining room, built with hidden leaves for hosting large family gatherings at holidays.



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Douglas Friedman

In the library, painted in Benjamin Moore’s CobbleStone Path, a custom bookcase and sofa envelop a Willy Rizzo cocktail table. Moroccan rug from Stark. Hanging light by Apparatus. Art by Richard Estes.

The palette is reserved, preferring lush textures, rich materials, and subtle motifs over bold statements. “I’m surrounded by so much pattern and color in the showroom,” Kenner explains. “I always want my home to be more soothing.” Textiles are a big part of the equation, almost all of them Stark or Stark-owned brands and many of them prototypes she is testing out. “As I was developing the collection, I knew exactly what would go in each room,” she says of the carpets, which range from a shaggy Moroccan rug to sisal to custom textured shearling. Walls wear textiles too, some papered in faux bois, others covered in braided hemp or wool. Works of fine art, like a bold Beverly Fishman painting in the dining room and a woven fiber piece by Brent Wadden in the living room, deliver a few happy hits of color.

The vibe is casual and family-friendly, yet still sophisticated. An avid cook, Kenner created her dream kitchen, outfitted by Gaggenau (“The face of the oven never gets hot, which is great with kids”), and is happy to report that it’s now the go-to family zone. Sofas passed down from her mother have been recovered in performance fabrics (“When I was little, I was never allowed to touch them”). The playroom is bold and graphic in black and white (“The toys bring the color”), and it’s easy to imagine it becoming a hangout in the future. “I’m a strong believer in making kids’ spaces that don’t look like kids’ spaces,” Kenner says.

As for those kids, it seems they’re already cultivating the family taste for textiles. Despite all the spaces created just for them, Kenner reveals, “Their favorite thing in the house is the shearling carpet in my dressing room.”

