

# Art Department



Nicole Franzen

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# Art Department

art design people

## VLife

Multidisciplinary creative  
Athena Calderone in the  
living area of her Brooklyn  
townhouse. Turn the page  
for the full story.



PHOTOGRAPH BY NICOLE FRANZEN

Nov/Dec 2020 51

### VLife

« would never keep me from using beautiful marble. I love the 'life' of a kitchen, ring marks and all! **A home holds emotion.** I am fascinated by the way memories are imbedded in the things you collect. Every piece in a room, even the room itself, has a story, and people feel that as soon as they step into the space. Design is an emotional thing. You enter a room and maybe you can't quite put your finger on why, but suddenly you feel calm, or relaxed, or intrigued, or even inspired.

**My home is my place of inspiration.** It is where I work and conceive ideas but it is also where I find calm and decompress. Most of all it is where I build memories with my family.

**The pandemic has inspired me to teach and share** more through my social channels, particularly IGTV. People want and need to love their homes more, and I want to help them do so. I want to encourage people to look at their homes through a new lens. Revamp, restyle and 're-appreciate' what they already have.

"Design is an emotional thing. You enter a room and maybe you can't quite put your finger on why, but suddenly you feel calm, or relaxed, or intrigued, or even inspired" ATHENA CALDERONE

**Not seeing my mum and dad [during lockdown]** has really been hard for me. And I really miss restaurants. Also, my husband is a DJ, so he is obviously not working, and while I love spending more time with him now that he's not on the road, the financial repercussions have been challenging. But honestly, I have loved this focused and precious time spent with my husband, son, and our new puppy, Tuco. We have never been together more, laughing more, cooking more, and in nature more. [VL eye-swoon.com](https://www.vogueliving.com)

Watch Athena Calderone host a virtual culinary experience as part of Vogue Living's 3 Days of Design on our YouTube channel; [youtube.com/voguelivingmagazine](https://www.youtube.com/voguelivingmagazine)

58 [vogueliving.com.au](https://www.vogueliving.com.au)



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP on the terrace, sofa from RH; vintage French chairs. In the main bedroom, bed from RH; 1950s French bench; chandelier by Angelo Lelli; artwork by Stuart Teague. In the office, table by Angelo Mangiarotti; Paima Topiary armchair from Perspective; vintage floor lamp. Details, last pages.



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THESE PAGES in the living area, armchairs by Theo Ruth; stool by Jules Leleu; 1970s Camaleonda sofa by Mario Bellini for B&B Italia; enquires to Space Furniture for reissued edition; Portal coffee table from Apparatus; vintage side table, wall sconces and floor lamp; Flora Ottilia chandelier by Atelier Démenture; rug from Soufiane Zarib.



VLife

« When it comes to interior inspiration, I love all of the rule-breaking going on right now — the embracing of personality, rather than the following of a formula. I feel that the best design happens when you don't have a plan and allow yourself to let a room unfold. When one seemingly singular choice leads you to the next and suddenly you have this wonderful, cohesive space — it's pure magic.

**Ninety per cent of the furniture in my home is vintage and that was certainly intentional.** I love a clash of cultures in decor. My townhouse is mostly a mix of Italian and French antiques from the 1940s through to the '70s. But I also sprinkled pieces from the 18th century here and there to drive home a sense of history and a little grit. This, along with a neutral but textural palette — from upholstery to wood tones to plaster walls — finishes the space. I find that you can achieve harmony beautifully using only a series of neutral palettes. The contrast of whites, creams and harsher blacks just engages the eye.

**We collaborated with Elizabeth Roberts Architects** and began to dissect our specific desires and needs as a family. My first step, and one I would encourage every homeowner to take, was to create a comprehensive floor-by-floor, room-by-room list of our collective and individual needs. Every minute detail was added to this program — the ideal location for each room and its purpose in the home. Compiling this list was really helpful in understanding how to divvy up the space. Dream big on this initial list; you can always scale back.

**The accumulation of each and every piece in my home was a granular alchemical experiment** of trusting my eye. 'Don't think, just go' became my mantra. I scoured Chairish, 1stdibs, auction sites, eBay, Instagram and estate sales. I obsessively emailed dealers, while aesthetic wanderlust found me on planes throughout Europe to claim these pieces I did not know I needed so desperately in my life until I saw them. These unique elements — an alabaster light fixture, a Peruvian vessel, a diminutive 1830s wooden Swedish chair — once united, began to speak their silent language.

**I love the kitchen.** It is the coming-together of my overlapping passions of food and design. With this space, I tried to find the sweet spot where use and efficiency beautifully collide with decor. The long kitchen shelf not only holds all of my plates, platters and glassware; it is also a place for me to express my love of vintage. I mingled in decorative objects like the petit rattan lamp, vintage sculpture, artwork and gilded mirror. You should not rob a functional space of decorative elements. A fear of staining »

Nov/Dec 2020 55

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## PROFILE

### Athena Calderone

An innate and considered sense of style informs everything this creative does, whether its cooking a meal for her family or decorating her home.

By Verity Magdalino  
Photographed by Nicole Franzen

In Greek mythology, Athena is not only the goddess of war and wisdom but also the patron of handicrafts. If there was a 21st-century reincarnation for crafting stunning interiors and culinary delights, Athena Calderone, the eloquently spoken Brooklyn-based designer, chef, author and founder of online lifestyle site EyeSwoon certainly fits the bill.

An interior design graduate of New York's Parsons School of Design, the trained dancer launched EyeSwoon in 2011 with the aim of sharing her favourite recipes and interior styling tips with friends. Since then Calderone has published two books — the first, *Cook Beautiful*, garnered a lauded James Beard award for photography. The most recent, *Live Beautiful*, documents what Calderone describes as "the alchemy of creation" in the homes of designers and creatives, including her own. She also has her own podcast, *More Than One Thing*.

Here, we talk to Athena about her journey from dancer to design diva, and the four-storey, three-bedroom 19th-century Greek Revival townhouse in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn, where she lives with her husband, Victor — an international DJ and music producer for the likes of Madonna, Beyoncé and Sting — and their teenage son, Jivan.

**I grew up in a small suburban town in Long Island, New York, just 30 minutes from New York City and yet a world away. As a child, I did not have an awareness of art or culture, but I was always creative. I studied dance in college, and in a way I can see the similarities between dance and design. They are both wordless expressions of the self that trigger an emotional response from the viewer, and involve interacting with space and form.**

**My appreciation for design began as a child growing up in our modest ranch-style home in**

THESE PAGES, FROM LEFT in the entrance of Athena Calderone's Brooklyn townhouse, artwork by Sam Messenger; flooring from reSAWN Timber Co. In the kitchen, cooker from Fisher & Paykel; stools from Thomas Hayes Studio; vintage vase from Heller & Squall. A corner of the living area. Details, last pages.



VLife

Long Island. My mum would rearrange the furniture on a weekly basis. I'd often walk into a room, only to find the layout flipped. It was exciting to be a bystander of these transformations and experience the ways in which a layout, a colour or a piece of furniture could completely alter a space. I certainly attribute my reverence for beauty to my mother.

**Over the past 20 years, I have owned and renovated eight homes.** Some may find the thought of ping-ponging around Brooklyn — as we have — to be unsettling. But for our family of three, it just feels natural and exciting. Every home has allowed me to strengthen my architecture and design muscles. I love to reinvent a space. I get silly excited by the all-encompassing research. I find the scavenging and collecting of objects downright thrilling. I fixate on the problem-solving until I find resolution, and I crave the knowledge these renovations offer me. Most of all, I love the journey. It's exhilarating, if you allow yourself to be led.

**EyeSwoon was years in the making.** I have always been a creative but found myself isolated at home in my mid-twenties after I had a baby; my husband Victor travelled often, and I spent most of my days in my Brooklyn apartment with a newborn. I was bursting with this creative energy and I didn't know where to put it. Most people define themselves and their careers out in the world and outside the home. For me, it was the exact opposite. Once I started channelling my artistic eye into my space, it became this amazing playground — a place to create, to design, to express myself. My home unified my passions for design, cooking, and beautiful things. »



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## POWDER ROOM

This small space gets the saturated, high-gloss treatment, with vivid tiles complemented by an equally dramatic black basin and distressed copper fixtures.

Tiles in Dark Emerald, Pratt & Larson. Basin, Kohler. Sinks, Waterworks.

## MASTER EN SUITE

A vintage Paul Frank credenza provided the inspiration for the vanity unit.

Vanity unit, bespoke by Jesse Parris-Lamb. Thurlow wall sconces, Urban Electric. Brassware, Lefroy Brooks.



## GUEST ROOM

The sleeping spaces were where Amanda and Whitney indulged in their favourite deep hues and patterns. 'Colour and materials were everything for us in this project,' says Whitney.

Walls in Townsend Harbor Brown HC-64, Benjamin Moore. Headboard, bespoke by Jesse Parris-Lamb in Utopia by Pierre Frey; made up by Genesis Upholstery. Light, Schoolhouse Electric.



## MASTER BEDROOM

Rich shades of ochre and plum warm up the concrete backdrop.

Goddard armchair, Pinch, in Cuba in Ochre, Saco. Screen, bespoke by Jesse Parris-Lamb, in Papilio, Fortuny; made up by Genesis Upholstery.

houses

## home truths

### MOST PRIZED POSSESSION?

Amanda: When I'm on site, my 25ft Stanley tape measure.

### WHAT ARE YOU HOPING FOR IN 2021?

Whitney: Unity, justice, travel and being able to hug my friends and family.

### FAVOURITE DESIGN ERA?

Both: We'd love to time travel back to the 1930s and 40s to be students at Black Mountain College. We met in graduate school and truly love working and learning together.

### LAST PIECE OF FURNITURE YOU BOUGHT?

Whitney: A vintage Roger Capron coffee table with a rich russet-coloured tile top.

### BEST WAY TO DE-STRESS AT THE END OF THE DAY?

Amanda: We each live within a 20-minute stroll of our studio, so our walks home through Brownstone Brooklyn give us time to decompress - before returning to the chaos of life with young families!

### INTERIORS IN 2021 WILL BE ...

Whitney: Well ventilated!

livingetc.com 59

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**KITCHEN**  
Manhattan hotel bar style meets  
loft living. The cabinets are in  
walnut with stainless-steel fronts  
that have been sandblasted and  
waxed for added patina.  
Kitchen, bespoke by Jesse  
Parris-Lamb. Bar stools, Wyeth.  
Live Sawn French Oak parquet  
flooring, The Hudson Company

livingetc.com 57

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## BAR

The high-shine design is bespoke by Jesse Parris-Lamb. Vintage Jindrich Halabala armchair upholstered in Tibetan sheepskin. Alwa side table, Sebastian Herkner for Pulpo. Wing stools, Alexander Lamont, in Tiger Mountain, Dedar

## LIVING AREA

A wrap-around banquette seat serves as a focal point in the open-plan space.

Banquette, bespoke by Jesse Parris-Lamb. Marianas table, Argosy Product Division. Dining chairs, vintage Charles Dudouyt

houses



W

ith velvet banquette seating that wouldn't look out of place in a Manhattan club and a kitchen island shaped like a cocktail shaker, this SoHo loft home is all about partying and having fun. Interior designers Amanda Jesse and Whitney Parris-Lamb had a blast creating this apartment that comes into its own on a Saturday night, but their challenge was to also include more restful spaces that are perfect for lazy Sunday mornings. 'The owner wanted it to feel more like a hotel lobby or nightclub than a conventional home, but we ensured it's a soft, comfortable and high-end place for day-to-day life, too,' explains Amanda. With a creative mix of materials and luxuriant colours, this exceptional home has a balance between night and day, and the public and the private.

Mindful of the building's industrial roots and the city's art-deco heritage, Amanda and Whitney also wanted to work these elements into the story. Deco-feel screens in steel and micro-fluted glass also help maintain

a smooth flow in what is predominantly an open-plan space, cleverly concealing storage and a WC. But the duo were careful not to go down the pastiche route. 'We studied a lot of authentic deco designs, but we didn't want ours to feel like a reproduction,' says Whitney. For decoration 'we took inspiration from a curvilinear motif in a French deco rug and then blew up the scale and abstracted it to feel more modern,' she adds.

The deco theme continues in the cosy smaller seating area, where heavy textures and rich materials lend a particular intimacy. 'At night, this little corner sparkles with glossy wood, polished copper and mirror glass,' says Amanda. It's a good example of how materials were key to bringing atmosphere into this home, particularly as the overall backdrop – the walls and floors – was to remain industrial grey concrete. Whitney and Amanda's solution was to go deep into texture and colour. 'We chose super-saturated textiles and opulent finishes,' says Whitney. But as they progressed, they and

their artistic plasterers developed a finish that brought 'the light-play and movement of Venetian plaster' to the concrete.

In the kitchen, surfaces and detailing also come to the fore. The monolithic island feels refined thanks to the scaled-up fluting and gentle curves. 'Early on, we nicknamed it the "silver bullet" as it was inspired by an art-deco cocktail shaker,' says Amanda.

By the entrance, the circular banquette that wraps around a structural pillar has a dual personality. First of all, the mohair velvet 'transforms from a warm olive in the day to pure gold in the moody evening light,' says Whitney. Then there's its functionality. After dark, it acts as a welcoming hub where guests enjoy their first cocktails. But, like every self-respecting metropolis superhero, come Monday morning it's back to being quietly good-looking and useful. 'It's where the owner sits to put on his shoes before he heads out to his day job,' smiles Amanda.

jesseparris-lamb.com

livingetc.com 55

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**In Motion**  
Want to see more?  
HGTV filmed my  
entire design  
process for *Home  
Again With the  
Fords*, which debuts  
this winter.

## Good as New

How do you know when something is worth keeping—and when it's worth replacing? Here's how I decide.

1.

### Consider Emotional Value

If you're designing a home for resale, I'm not the girl to talk to. But if you're trying to create a space that you feel attached to, then the first thing you need to consider is emotional value. Does your home's old wallpaper make your heart go pitter-patter? Then don't replace it.

2.

### Spend on History

Refinishing old floors might cost you the same as buying shiny new ones, and it might not be as perfect, but if you love a weathered look, then who cares?

3.

### Go Dark

When everything in the cottage started to look a little too homemade, a friend gave me this advice: Add black, which makes things feel more luxe. That's why the counter tops look layered—we put marble right on top of the butcher block. It made such a difference.

### Be Our Guest

In the end I'm happy that we chose family, and I'm proud of us for doing that very consciously, but it turned out to be no sacrifice at all. It's actually just a much happier, healthier life for us.

98

99

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## Ever After

The previous owners left so many things, like the twin beds. On the property we also have a lot of gardens and a little henhouse, so I wanted to hone in on the cottage style, which is imperfect and lovely and intimate.

From top: Akari Ceiling Lamp [noguchi.org](http://noguchi.org); Vintage Bed Frames; Washed Linen Gauze Throws by Maison de Vacances and Ila Bedding [ahelove.com](http://ahelove.com); Antique Vase [weissdome.com](http://weissdome.com). On Food: Shirt [acnestudios.com](http://acnestudios.com); Jeans [buckmanon.com](http://buckmanon.com). On Ever: Outfit [andlostores.com](http://andlostores.com).



The first step to adding character and warmth isn't about adding at all: It's about keeping as much soul as you can.

rather, um, intensely, and I sat there thinking, Did I just ruin this project? But it actually came out beautifully. The glow that comes off of them is flattering.

People ask me all the time why my designs feel so warm. Not to totally give away my cheat sheet, but it's pretty simple. I walk into a space and I think: Okay, what is good? What can we keep? I'm not looking for perfect. I'm looking for special. At the same time, I'm not trying to make a movie set. I want it to be livable. What most people don't realize is that the first step to adding character and warmth isn't actually about adding anything at all: It's about keeping as much soul as you can.

For instance, the floors. If you look at them on the main level, they're patched with tile—that's where the old walls were. Why didn't I replace them completely? For no reason other than I didn't want to take out everything and start with new materials. This home has history, 120 years of it, and I am here to be a part of that. I am a steward.

In the kitchen, I wrapped the outside of my new oven, which I had bought in olive green, in a terracotta-colored custom vinyl. The olive was not working, but the stove was gorgeous, and I wasn't going to get another one. Wrapping it was my brother's idea, inspired by his love of old cars.

The wood I used for the open shelving was all from the ceiling rafters we removed upstairs. It was already a part of the house, so why replace it? We also hid the Smeg fridge behind old confessionary doors I found at one of my favorite Pittsburgh thrifting spots.

As the design evolved, so did the story. Even though I started with a French castle theme, by the end I jokingly rebranded it "girls' trip with Georgia O'Keeffe to the Paris countryside in Joshua Tree." Honestly, what it turned into was a glorified potter's shed. My garden dream.

When I really think about it, buying a beautiful move-in-ready house—and then renovating the guesthouse first—pretty much sums up Erik and me as people. One of my favorite things about Pittsburgh is that it's a halfway mark between Nashville and New York City, so my friends who are musicians—like Lord Huron, the Lone Bellow, Escondido, Odessa, Nikki Lane, Among Savages, and Rayland Baxter—will have a place to crash that has a groovy closet-turned-room with guitars, a record player, and a screen door to let the music flow in and out. I can't wait to photograph them, and all of my friends and creative souls, for my guest book of Polaroids that I keep for visitors.

Something tells me this home will be ever-evolving. Coming on 40, I am finally realizing that it's my nature to move forward—and to start over and over again. And maybe that's just fine.



## She's a Keeper

I try to salvage everything and use everything I can. When you keep as much of the original house as possible, it feels warmer and you feel more connected to it.

Woven Pendant Lamp [anthropologie.com](http://anthropologie.com); Untitled, Blue/Pink/White Painting by Elaina Sullivan; Vintage Demilune Cabinet; Vintage Turkish Oushak Rug [scissdhouse.com](http://scissdhouse.com).

97

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I walk into a space and I think: Okay, what is good? I'm not looking for perfect. I'm looking for special.



**Cottage Core**  
Stone looks so much prettier with the grout not washed off—it's my version of whitewashing. It adds an earthy element, and it's fun. You just rub a ton of grout on. We even did it over patches of wallpaper in the main bedroom to mute it a bit.

This page, from top: Tropex Freestanding Concrete Basin \$1,926 [concretecreation.com.au](http://concretecreation.com.au); Transie Single-Handle Faucet [deltafaucet.com](http://deltafaucet.com); Fields Case-Back Accent Chair by Leanne Ford \$299 [crutchfieldbarrel.com](http://crutchfieldbarrel.com); Vintage Floor Lamp; Daddy Painting by Elaina Sullivan; Vintage Coffee Table by Karl Springer; Eern Moroccan Rug and Antique Vase [revivethedream.com](http://revivethedream.com).

Opposite: Vintage Smeets Cocoon Pendant Lamp by George Nelson; Bola Table Lamp \$295 [daz.com](http://daz.com); Wood Side Table [baasheuteli.com](http://baasheuteli.com); Willy Plaster Pedestal Side Table \$299 and Plain Weave Pillows by Leanne Ford \$100 each [crutchfieldbarrel.com](http://crutchfieldbarrel.com); Enzyme Linen Pillow \$300 [ruguld.com](http://ruguld.com); Pillar Decorative Objects by Lenieux et Cie \$250 each [anthropologie.com](http://anthropologie.com); Chunky Woven Coverlet by Kevin O'Brien \$595 and Washed Linen Gauze Throw by Maison de Vacances [dekhance.com](http://dekhance.com).



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## In the Mix

Bringing in marble, metal, and modern pieces really helped round things out and kept it from looking too homemade. The oven backsplash (opposite) is leftover terracotta tiles that we found in the henhouse, which I plan to turn into a pottery studio.

This page: Snoozer Storage Ottoman by Leanne Ford [8399crateandbarrel.com](http://8399crateandbarrel.com); Vintage Table: Opposite: Rinka Tableware by Kinoko Kohyo from [824regard.com](http://824regard.com); Pour Me Mixing Bowl by Leanne Ford [850crateandbarrel.com](http://850crateandbarrel.com); Gas Range [smegusa.com](http://smegusa.com) with Custom Vinyl Covering; Curtains in Gingham Fabric [leatherloghome.com](http://leatherloghome.com).

cardboard boxes that we had just unpacked and move our family back to rural Pennsylvania, close (but not too close) to where I grew up.

We found a 1900s home in a town outside of Pittsburgh that was once a vacation spot for Pennsylvania royalty—the Heines and the Carnegies and the Mellons—during the turn of the century. The main house was built by a well-known architect, Charles Barton Keen, for a local family. It was stunning, but it strangely wasn't the pull for me.

It was the other buildings on the land, the old, beat-up forgotten parts, that I fell in love with. When we saw the carriage house, I knew it would be the perfect place to host guests, and I completely fell for it—hard. It reminded me of a decrepit, gorgeous place outside of Paris in some town I've never heard of. And because I can't go to France right now, I thought, why can't we just create that feeling in Pennsylvania? To this day, it feels to me like we bought the carriage house and the sellers "threw in" the main house for good measure.

We found our secret garden. And we wanted to share it. And that's why we wanted to get the guesthouse together first; to me, homes are like happiness, better when shared. We wanted people to feel good here, to have a place to relax and stay longer than just three days. Heck, to move in! In fact my sister-in-law, Ali, is living there right now while she helps with our daughter.

I was also eager to get going on the project because I love cottage style. I'm constantly walking the line between preserving a home's bones and making it my own. I love doing imperfect. Some might say I am great at being imperfect! (Not offended.) I also didn't have to think about clients. I didn't even have to think about resale—we aren't going anywhere, at least I hope—and it wasn't about everyday living, so I didn't have to be so practical. All of these factors were so freeing. So I decided to let HGTV film my brother and me and the entire process for our new show, *Home Again With the Fords*.

My original inspiration was interior designer Sibella Court. I was going to do saturated colors and just wallpaper, wallpaper, wallpaper—a nod to my castle dream. But as I started diving in, I realized that it isn't my true nature to do it that way. I was trying to work with these dark wood beams that were original to the house, but they were totally throwing me off. All I wanted to do was paint them white. I was totally stuck, and I lost a week to indecision. As soon as I decided, "I can't help it, I'm going to paint them white," everything came together.

Another follow-your-gut moment was the walls. My husband drinks the strongest pour-over coffee, and he never finishes the Chemex, so I started pouring the leftover brew into a jar. One day I took it over to the cottage and just rubbed it on the walls. When I came back the next day, it had set in





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I'M

not the only one who thinks of living in some foreign country, like on a beach down in Mexico or in an off-the-grid old estate outside of a small European town. It was always my mental escape plan.

But an epiphany hit me all too recently that I didn't have to leave my country and my family to live that small-town life. I could find a beautiful old

estate on land near my hometown and live the same dream, just speaking English and designing with inches instead of centimeters. And so that's exactly what we did.

We found land with a garden, and a greenhouse with a toolshed that's prettier than most. And we found a project—an old historic home with a carriage house—that will probably take me a lifetime to “finish,” only to start over again.

Nowadays, our life involves walking to the social club and biking to the creek. We have picnics in the backyard. And we play old swing music. Sure, the music is playing out of a rock-shaped speaker, and the social club sells frozen margaritas in a plastic cup, but other than that, we are living our European dream.

A European dream that our moms and our family and friends can hop in a car to come enjoy with us.

But let me go back for a second. When quarantine started, our life changed. Which meant the plans for our Los Angeles house changed with it. My husband, Erik, and I had a lot, and I do mean a lot, of discussions: What does our future look like now? What would be best for quality of life? What would be best for our then 1-year-old daughter, Ever? What happens to our careers now that we can't get on an airplane? Once we actually looked closely at the life we had chosen, our priorities shifted in one swoop.

We very consciously decided, if we're going to be “stuck” for a while, then we want to be stuck closer to family. So after only four months of living in our newly semi-renovated Rustic Canyon home, we decided to load up those very same

## Natural Wonders

Once the walls were patched, which we legally had to do, they looked so beat up and imperfect—and I loved it. I told the workers, “Do not clean them up. Do not sand them.” They asked me four times if I was sure, just in case.

**This spread:** Ever Slipcovered Sofa by Leanne Ford \$9,299 [centroculture.com](http://centroculture.com); Vintage Italian Marble Side Tables and Moroccan Rug [veichouse.com](http://veichouse.com); Vintage Wicker Chair; Vase [boschen.net.com](http://boschen.net.com); Rex Pillows \$400 each, Rex Fur Throw \$2,400, Sculptures by Martin Pearce [regard.com](http://regard.com); Woven Pendant Lamps [outlamps.org.com](http://outlamps.org.com); Painted Wood Collage by Robert Yowler \$1,800 [twinscottstudio.com](http://twinscottstudio.com); **Previous spread:** On Ford: Sweater by C by Bloomingdale's [bloomingdales.com](http://bloomingdales.com); Suit [reiss.com](http://reiss.com).



## Reno Breakdown

**LOCATION**  
Outside of Pittsburgh

**YEAR BUILT**  
1900s

**SQUARE FEET**  
1,200-sq ft

**TIMELINE**  
2 months

**TOP PRIORITY**  
Creating an inviting space for family and friends to stay the night—or never leave.

90

91

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**In Neutral**  
Now that we're in the country, our quality of life has doubled. When your mind is a bit freer, you just create better stuff.

*Photography by Nicole Franzen*

*Words by Leanne Ford*

*Styling by Kate Berry*

## COMING HOME

After living in New York, Nashville, and Los Angeles, designer Leanne Ford finally returns to her Pennsylvania roots.

## AGAIN

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ABOVE A 19TH-CENTURY ALABASTER PENDANT CROWNS THE MASTER BATH. THE VINTAGE ARMCHAIR WEARS A SCHUMACHER COTTON; JACQUES ADNET STOOL. RIGHT IN THE MASTER BEDROOM, THE RH BED IS COVERED IN A LINEN BY ROSE TARLOW MELROSE HOUSE. RH LINENS; 1950S ITALIAN CHANDELIER; MATT CONNORS PAINTING.

The house had been so stripped down that it felt somewhat “sterile,” as *Brent* puts it. “Our job was going to be to give it some soul again.”



A PIERRE FREY LINEN WRAPS THE WALLS OF OSKAR'S BEDROOM. THE CRIB IS BY RH BABY & CHILD. A LINEN STRIPE BY CAROLINA IRVING TEXTILES COVERS THE 1950 ARMCHAIR. 1950S FRENCH FLOOR LAMP; 1950S ITALIAN CHANDELIER; ART BY MICHAEL HAINES.

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POPPY PLAYS IN THE COURTYARD, WHICH FEATURES A 17TH-CENTURY FRENCH FOUNTAIN AND AN 18TH-CENTURY STONE TABLE.

IN THE KITCHEN, THE CUSTOM HOOD, BACKSPLASH, AND COUNTERTOPS ARE MADE OF CALACATTA MACCHIA VECCHIA MARBLE. CUSTOM FITTINGS BY VAN CROENBURG; RANGE BY LA CORNUE.

There's no point in beating around the bush. Nate Berkus and Jeremiah Brent want you to know they're embarrassed. Chastened. "Humiliated!" says Berkus. Seated in a pair of armchairs in front of a blazing fire in their new West Village town house, the married designers look content and perfectly at home—if a little sheepish. After all, it seems like just yesterday when they moved into what was supposed to be their dream home, a nearly 9,000-square-foot Spanish colonial in Los Angeles. Fans of their TLC show, *Nate & Jeremiah by Design* (and readers of *AD*'s January 2018 story), witnessed the couple gushing over the house's sun-drenched rooms, wrought-iron balustrade, and 200-year-old oak tree in the backyard. The house, they proclaimed, was where they and their then-two-year-old daughter, Poppy, would "put down roots."

*Ruh-roh.* Now, just two years later, they've sold the house, edited down their belongings, and booked it back to New York, the city where the couple started dating and first made a home together. "One thing I can promise you," says Berkus, leaning forward in his chair, his blue eyes twinkling, "is that I will never again tell a publication that a house is my 'forever home.'"

"We learned our lesson," chimes in Brent. "We shan't be saying that again!"

The photogenic first couple of TV home makeovers had originally moved West following the death of Berkus's father in 2015. Berkus, who was born in Orange County but mostly raised in suburban Minneapolis, wanted to be closer to his siblings out in Southern California. "And we were ready for a new adventure," he explains. During their time there, they filmed three seasons of their show, welcomed the birth of baby Oskar (now two), and continued to grow their separate design businesses. (Berkus's headquarters have always been based in Chicago; Brent kept his New York practice going, and also opened a Los Angeles office.) But almost immediately, Brent missed the energy and street life back East. "I felt untethered in Los Angeles," he says. "It didn't feel like us." He also became convinced that Poppy, now five, and Oskar would have a richer experience growing up in the urban density of New York. "I realized that Poppy talked to the same 11 people every day," he says.

Berkus (eventually) came around, too. "I realized that New York would never get out of Jeremiah's system," he says. And he knew that he personally would be just as happy either way. "Jeremiah always says, 'It's either the place or the space that holds you.' For him it's the place," he says, gesturing toward the windows and the city beyond. "For me it's the space."

Fortunately, transforming four walls into a home is something Nate and Jeremiah know a thing or two about. When the couple saw this 3,400-square-foot 1899 town house, they immediately agreed it felt like them—or, at least, that it had the potential to. It had just undergone a complete gut renovation, so everything from the wiring and plumbing to the newly tiled bathrooms was in pristine condition. But the house had been so stripped down that it also felt somewhat "sterile," as Brent puts it. "Our job was going to be to give it some soul again."

They started by designing a showstopping double-height bookcase in white oak that would not only warm up the living room but also provide a much-needed place for their books, framed family photos, and pottery. "I didn't want to live without those picture frames—they've been in every home I've lived in for the past 15 years," says Berkus. The white oak bookcase is a small feat of engineering: It is so heavy, the upper portion had to be bolted to the exterior wall. "It's my favorite of everything we did here," says Berkus. "It set the tone."

In fact, one could say the bookshelf is a distillation of the designers' twofold approach to the whole house: adding texture, detail, and architectural touches (through eye-catching mantels, wallpaper, and vintage light fixtures), while also taking on the dilemma of space management. Because, when compared with a palatial Southern California estate, an 18-foot-wide town house is relatively... cramped.

"Painful" is how Berkus, the family's alpha layerer and

collector-in-chief, describes the editing-down process. They moved some furniture to their offices, other pieces to storage, and sold still more on Berkus's 1stDibs shop. They winnowed down their cookware. They off-loaded racks of clothing to The RealReal. "Our old living room had 30 pieces of furniture," says Berkus. "This one has six! But what you see is the best that we've got." And with the designers' addition of basket-weave grass-cloth wall covering, an 18th-century Italian mantel, and a plush mohair rug, the result is as handsome as rooms get.

Upstairs, the master suite didn't offer quite enough closet space. "Bill Blass said that dressing rooms should be large and bathrooms should be small," says Berkus. In lieu of ripping up the bathroom, they stole footage from the bedroom area to accommodate more storage. And while the resulting sleeping chamber may seem small, it embodies tranquility at its coziest, with chalky plaster walls, looped ivory carpeting, and a sculptural fluted plaster cabinet they designed to hide the TV.

"We don't need a huge bedroom with, like, 20 seating areas," says Berkus.

"Yeah, like, who's coming over?" adds Brent.

Nobody—except, of course, Poppy and Oskar, who much prefer wreaking havoc in their basement playroom or marching around the kitchen island as Brent makes their favorite pancakes. And when everybody starts going stir-crazy, well, that's fine too. "The best part," says Berkus, "is we just turn the doorknob and the whole city is right outside." ■

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ABOVE IN A SITTING AREA, A 1940S ARMCHAIR AND SHEARLING-COVERED SOFA SURROUND THE 1960S COCKTAIL TABLE BY DIEGO GIACOMETTI. PAINTING BY JAMES HD BROWN. LEFT THE TERRACE IS DECORATED WITH SEATING COVERED IN SUNBRELLA FABRIC.

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