ARTFUL UPDATE

He may be known for his pared-down aesthetic, but when Joe D'Urso tackles the renovation of a historic Greenwich Village townhouse, the result is anything but minimal

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In the living room of a West Village townhouse designed by Joe D'Urso, the sofa and cocktail table are custom made, the swivel armchairs are vintage Bruno Mathsson, and the pair of George Nakashima stools have cushions covered in a Designers Guild fabric; the photograph is by Vik Muniz, and the silk-screen Brillo sculptures are by Andy Warhol. **FACING PAGE:** D'Urso designed the cabinetry in the entry, the small chest is by Harvey Probber, and the vintage chandelier is by Poul Henningsen; the painting is by Damien Hirst, and the rug is by Rifat Ozbek for Christopher Farr. See Resources.

A painting by Jonathan Lasker hangs above a Japanese tansu chest in the living room; the bookcase is custom made, and the floors are wenge. **FACING PAGE:** A self-portrait by Chuck Close is in the basement stair landing; the custom light fixture is made of pendants by Verner Panton, who also designed the rug.

HE MAY HAVE BEEN RAISED on Manhattan's Upper East Side, but a young real estate developer with a devotion to contemporary art knew exactly where he wanted to live after marrying and starting a family: downtown, in the West Village. He and his wife moved into the neighborhood, nudging themselves from building to building as the size of their family and their art collection grew. At three children, and with canvases by a clutch of new masters and a river-view apartment, they finally came to rest.

Until a singular opportunity arrived: A pair of Federal-style townhouses was being combined into a single-family home, and the owner had run into money trouble shortly after demolition, leaving the parcel available at a steep discount. Maybe *parcel* wasn't quite the right word for it; what was actually on the market was a hole in the ground and a brick facade that needed to be rebuilt according to strict landmark codes. It took some imagination to visualize the four-story dwelling that might rise on the site, but the developer had no problem with that. He saw the potential.

After a false start with an architect that yielded a new facade and a partially completed structure, the couple turned to their friend Joe D'Urso. An interior designer whose name is synonymous with hard-edged minimalism, D'Urso was not the obvious choice to reimagine a pair of 1830s landmarks, but he was the sentimental one. He'd already crafted a Hamptons getaway for the family, and he knew their tastes and their quirks. Moreover, he was interested, never having designed a multistory townhouse.

What he had designed, though, was nearly everything else—from an Upper East Side apartment for Calvin Klein to an iconic Los Angeles flagship store for the clothing brand Esprit to a line of cult-favorite sofas and tables for Knoll. A protégé of Ward Bennett, D'Urso came

of age professionally with the Manhattan loft culture of the 1970s, espousing the utilitarian beauty of restaurant stoves, Metro shelving, surgical sinks, and gray industrial wall-to-wall carpeting.

Forty years on, D'Urso continues to work quietly on a project or two at a time. He's broadened his repertoire, though he still champions elegant understatement. The developer and his wife were more than clients—they were true believers. "Joe is so talented, such a legend," the husband says, "but PR is not his thing."

The couple's goal for the new house was casual family living, with separate bedrooms for the children (soon to number four), a basement playroom, and large walls for hanging art. When D'Urso signed on, he realized he could exploit the structure's 36-foot width to create an air of openness almost unheard of in townhouse design. A collagist when it comes to floor plans, he also happened to be unburdened by any conventional townhouse design wisdom. "Construction is my day job," the husband says, smiling, "but still, this was a challenge."

Designer and client differed pointedly on the first-floor layout. "The challenge was where to put the kitchen, which became controversial," D'Urso recalls. "I wanted to place it at the front of the house, which is big enough to include areas for eating and lounging. It can also be closed off. This gave us the option to move the living room to

George Nakashima chairs surround a custom-made table in the kitchen/dining area; the light fixture is by Poul Henningsen, and the photograph is by Richard Prince. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP:** In the lounge adjacent to the kitchen, the Noguchi table is by Knoll, the Eames side chair is by Herman Miller, and the chandelier is by Serge Mouille; the rocking chair is by George Nakashima, the cabinet is by his daughter, Mira Nakashima, and above it hangs a painting by Kenneth Noland. D'Urso designed the playroom's sofa, upholstered in a leather by Keleen, with cushions and pillows covered in Donghia cottons; the print series is by Robert Indiana. See Resources.

In the top-floor office, the desk and sofa are custom designs, the cocktail table is by Gio Ponti, and the Vladimir Kagan armchair and ottoman are covered in a fabric by Brunschwig & Fils; the floor lamp is by Alvar Aalto, the table lamp is by Luceplan, and the artworks are by Richard Serra (left) and Kenneth Noland. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP:** The courtyard's stone bench and mahogany screen are custom made, the table is by Richard Schultz, and the outdoor lamp is by Fontana Arte. A sculpture by Harry Bertoia hangs above a Kohler tub with Lefroy Brooks fittings in the master bath; the cabinetry is custom made, and the walls are lined with German oak and Calacatta marble, and trimmed with honed black granite. See Resources.

A 17th-century Japanese screen spans a wall of the master bedroom; the sofa upholstery and pillows are in Rogers & Goffigon fabrics, the wing chair and ottoman are by Vladimir Kagan, the cocktail table is by T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings, and the stool is by Poul Kjaerholm. The chandelier is by Serge Mouille, and the vintage floor lamp is by Stilnovo. **FACING PAGE:** The master bedroom's custom headboard is upholstered in a Donghia fabric, and above it hangs an Ellsworth Kelly lithograph; the cabinet is by George Nakashima, the carpet is by Misha Carpet, and the walls are painted in Benjamin Moore Regal Select in Pearl. See Resources.

the back, facing the rear courtyard, and allowed for the insertion of a large skylight and a wood-burning fireplace."

D'Urso convinced the couple to do it his way, and also to invest in major expanses of granite and German oak for walls and other surfaces. "I strive to make spaces that get better through time and use," he explains. "So rather than leaving large areas of painted drywall that can get touched and abused, I like to render with wood, stone, and metal." The materials make luxurious envelopes for the classic modernist furnishings the designer deployed, including pieces by George Nakashima, Arne Jacobsen, Poul Kjaerholm, and Vladimir Kagan. Into this stew went a few surprise ingredients: shapely Carl Auböck brass hardware, a Tiffany chandelier in the mudroom, and a 17th-century Japanese screen in the master bedroom that D'Urso found to echo his own design for the pocket garden on the ground floor.

"Joe is both practical and lavish in ways that are unexpected," the husband notes. "I let him run wild on the stone, but then he found me a Rauschenberg lithograph for just $6,000 at auction, and it's maybe my favorite piece in the whole house."

That's saying something. The family's very personal collection includes work by Ellsworth Kelly, Richard Prince, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and many others. It was D'Urso's rare skill to finesse their top-drawer art, architecture, and furnishings into such a delectable and ultimately understated whole.

"The house is a real evolution," says the husband. "The palette, the materials Joe knew that we liked—it all started on the Hamptons project but blossomed here. I don't want to move again until my three-year-old goes to college." ■