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Tour a Brooklyn Townhouse That Was Inspired by English Country Homes

It has a notable tie to local botanical history

By Jenny Xie

Photography by Thomas Richter

May 5, 2023



Art: Romain Laprade

It goes without saying that good bones rank high on the real estate wish list, but what that means can be hard to define. In this Brooklyn townhouse built in 1824, good bones comprise a rational layout spread out over 4,400 square feet, wide framing, and high ceilings that “create a spaciousness that counterbalance the chaotic nature of a young family,” say the clients, who have a son and daughter, both under ten. Fitting for the former family home of renowned landscape architect Alice Ireys—best known for her work on the [Brooklyn Botanic Garden](#)—a charming backyard garden lends light and views to the lower-level kitchen and breakfast nook.

The four-story 19th-century Brooklyn Heights townhouse also flaunts architectural details that range “from the worn tobacco front door and black-shuttered exterior to the original moldings and brass-door hardware inside,” says the husband. The task for [interior design firm White Arrow](#),

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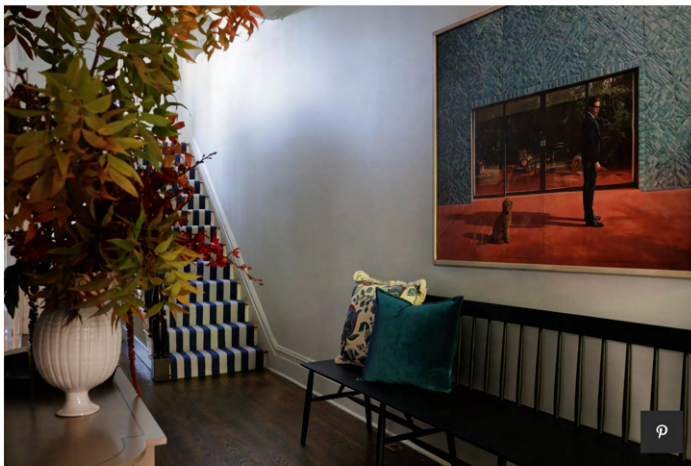
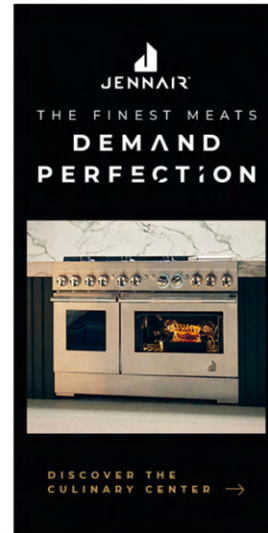
then, was to create fresh, contemporary spaces that are conducive to family life and honor the home's historic character. In doing so, the husband-and-wife team evoked the English countryside in a nod to the home's provenance, bringing in floral motifs, bold patterns, and rich colors. "There was ultimately a European and old-world American angle we were aiming for—traditional but with a twist," says Keren Richter, who cofounded the studio along with her husband, Thomas Richter.

The dynamism and balance between eras and styles are especially apparent on the parlor level, where the formal dining room is wrapped in hand-printed botanical wallpaper from [Hamilton Weston's Martha Armitage collection](#), echoing the blue in the antique Delft tiles surrounding the original fireplace. This room is open to, and in conversation with, the living room, presided over by a dramatically curved, green velvet couch. "There's an organic quality to it that's quite playful," says Keren. "It feels like a boomerang to the dining room. Since those two spaces are open to each other, I wanted it to feel like a welcoming silhouette."

Not unlike the experience of wandering through a thoughtfully curated garden, walking through the home brings a continual sense of discovery. "I often use color to give the house a sense of travel," says Keren. "Every room creates its own experience in your body where you're feeling energized or cozy, or playful or exuberant. There's an opportunity for the rooms to be their own environment, yet they're all connected through material or motif." The daughter's bedroom, for example, features floral wallpaper that echoes the pattern in the dining room, and the son's bedroom furniture is a cherry red shade that reflects the chairs in the eat-in kitchen.

Nestled alongside kid-friendly spaces are custom storage solutions that help minimize clutter and more subdued adult retreats, like the home office, primary suite, and family room. Keeping sight lines in mind, White Arrow painted and reupholstered a vintage [Paul Frankl](#) chair in leather so that anyone who passes the office gets a handsome view. Meanwhile, the family room, where everyone gathers for movie nights, is painted a dark blue for a cocoon effect. "The monochrome design allows the art and book collection to stand out while also creating a private cave in which to retreat," says the wife.

Overall, the Brooklyn town house feels fluid yet cohesive, alternating between active and peaceful spaces—as well as traditional and contemporary silhouettes. "We tried to be bold in patterning and color in this home," says Keren. "Ultimately, it feels warm and inviting with a fun, botanical, and playful bent."



Art: Dean West

1/11

The Rabbit bench from [Sawkill](#) offers a perch beneath a photograph by Dean West that the clients love for its "vibrant, slightly surreal, Hockney-nod appeal," they say. A custom wool runner with bold blue stripes leads the eye upward from the entryway.



Art: Romain Laprade

2/11

A custom green velvet bench from [LeDik](#) mirrors the color of the sofa in the living room by [Keren Richter and Thomas Richter](#).

A custom green velvet couch from [JSLiving](#) curves around a Kant console table by [Roman and Williams Studio](#) and complements a Silla Pista lounge chair from [Siglo Moderno](#). The organic, contemporary shapes play against historic details like the antique Delft tiles surrounding the fireplace. "There's part of me that loves trinkets, antiques, and John Derian—influenced by both my mother and grandmother's cozy interiors growing up," says the husband. "But there's also a part that—maybe from living in NYC for decades—has grown to appreciate simple and modern design. Ultimately, I think the house allows us to explore a little bit of both."



3/11

Visible from the living room, the dining room amplifies the home's botanical motif with hand-printed Marthe Armitage wallpaper from [Hamilton Weston](#). A custom chandelier by O'lampia hangs over a [Nickey Kehoe](#) Harvest dining table and [Svenskt Tenn](#) dining chairs. "I simultaneously love old houses and modern design," says the wife. "It was important to me that the design reflect the needs and tastes of a young family, but still feel appropriate for the age and style of the house. I think White Arrow really achieved that objective—the dining room is a great example."





4/11

The lower-level kitchen cabinets are painted a bright blue, courtesy of [Fine Paints of Europe](#). Gordon stools from [Lostine](#) perch underneath rattan cone hanging lights from [Soane](#).

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5/11

The playfully bulbous Bobbin table by [Alfred Newall](#) is surrounded by red Chiara dining chairs from [Ceraudo](#) in the eat-in kitchen. "There are moments in the house that feel joyful and energetic, and in some ways, I was doing that to mitigate the [lack of] light," says Keren. "In the kitchen, for example, I was trying to offset that by bringing in more saturated, playful colors like the light blue and candy apple red."

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6/11

The family room, coated in dark blue paint from [Fine Paints of Europe](#), is where everyone gathers to watch movies. The large sectional is custom, as is the generous ottoman, which, says the wife, "can be used as an extra seat, a holder for popcorn and lemonades, or, in our son's more mischievous moments, a hovercraft or skateboard."

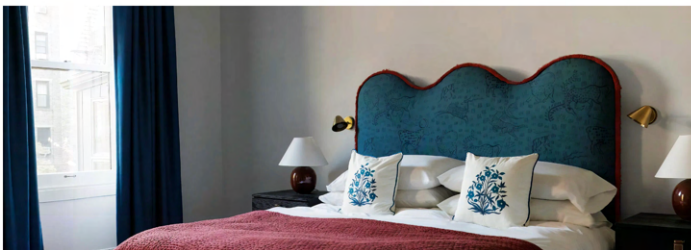


7/11

Keren compares the home office, which overlooks the garden, to a ship's prow. Striped [Dedar](#) Roman shades pick up the striped pattern from the wool runner on the stairwell and hang over a stately Warren desk from [Fern](#). A Bianca ceiling light from [Maison Sarah Lavoine](#) and vintage [Jacques Adnet](#) table lamp add subtle color. "The back of the chair was really important with sight lines," says Keren. "We found a vintage Paul Frankl chair and painted it and reupholstered it in leather, and it's a great chair you get to enjoy from the back as well."



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8/11

A Kyma headboard by Ensembler brings a note of whimsy to the bedroom, which also features a Nickey Kehoe bench upholstered in striped [Flora Soames](#) fabric and [Glant](#) Wool curtains. Sphere table lamps by [Episode](#) flank the bed.



9/11

In the bathroom, which features an existing bathtub and original blue floors, hangs artwork by Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Frank Miller from the *Des Moines Register*, where the husband's father and grandparents worked. These pieces were gifted by the artist to the family.



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10/11

"The same botanical element [from the dining room] is happening in the daughter's bedroom," says Keren. "I enjoy how the bottom and top of the house are still in the same conversation after you've woven through with the striped staircase." The girl's room continues the garden motif with Svenskt Tenn wallpaper and a [Les Fauves rug by Loloj](#). The Bodie bed is from [Crate & Barrel](#), and the farmhouse nightstand is from [Anthropologie](#).



Art: Jamie L. Luoto

11/11

A custom bed and vintage Vico Magistretti desk chair in the son's bedroom pick up the cherry red tones of the furniture in the eat-in kitchen a few floors below. Over the Baxter writing desk from [Chilton Furniture](#) hang six animal prints by Jamie Luoto that the boy has had in his room since he was a few years old.

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