THE SOFTER SIDE OF MODERN

AN ARMADA OF COLOR, PATTERN, AND TEXTURE TAKES THE EDGE OFF A SLEEK NEW YORK BROWNSTONE.

INTERIOR DESIGN BY **CRISTINA AZARIO** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **FRANCESCO LAGNESE**
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WHEN CRISTINA AZARIO

AND JOSH ABRAM MOVED WITH THEIR TWO TEENAGE SONS FROM A DUPLEX APARTMENT IN THE HEART

of Manhattan's Upper East Side to a nondescript block in East Harlem, most of their friends had the same reaction: Why? But anyone who grew up with Abram, an entrepreneur and founder of NeueHouse, a luxe, members-only work collective for creative enterprises, wasn't all that surprised. A native New Yorker, Abram was raised in the storied Dakota building on Central Park West and chose an old milk truck for his first car. "My husband has always been romanced by the edges," says Azario. "He is not one to follow the herd."

Indeed, the upper reaches of Manhattan appealed to Abram's renegade spirit; the zoning laws are far looser than in the city's tonier precincts. So when the couple spotted a forlorn three-story brownstone while visiting fellow freewheeling friends on the same block five years ago, they bought it instantly. The pair tapped Architecture and Hygiene, a firm known for the use of cutting-edge industrial materials, to embark on a full renovation. "They are that rare combination of artist-architects," Azario says.

In the nine months that followed, three stories became five with an extension off the back, and the rear brick wall was entirely replaced with a steel-and-glass storefront system (the old bricks were

A bergère from Azario's childhood home mixes seamlessly with twin Brazilian wood chairs in the library. Custom sofa in Cristina Azario hemp. Floor lamp, Flou. Zebra pillow, Mecox Gardens. OPENING PAGES, LEFT: Throw, Cristina Azario. Walls in Clinton Brown, Benjamin Moore Regal Select. OPENING PAGES, RIGHT: Armchairs in vintage kilims, George Smith. Custom sofa in Cristina Azario hemp. African table, Liza Sherman Antiques.

“I USED NATURAL AND WHITE HEMP AND HAD MANY OF THE PIECES TUFTED TO INTRODUCE A SOFTNESS INTO THE ROOMS.”

A soaring tufted headboard gives the master bedroom a touch of drama. Linens, throw, and bench, Cristina Azario. Bedside table (left), Le Décor Français. Art, Thomas Connolly. Walls in Eagle Rock, Benjamin Moore Regal Select.

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repurposed on the patio). Meanwhile, Azario, the former creative director of Frette and the founder of an eponymous couture linens company, designed the serene interior. “I wanted the place to exude a calmness, the kind that Paris apartments always seem to possess,” says the Turin, Italy, native, who was born into a top textile-manufacturing family.

Despite her cultivated roots and impressive résumé, Azario found it challenging to fit out the 5,000-square-foot space, which combines the scale of a traditional townhouse with the soaring ceilings of a contemporary loft. Having lived in prewar apartments exclusively, she sought to reproduce the character and warmth that so much molding and coffering impart. She found the solution in a palette of three different grays that runs through the house. “I wanted patina, and this was one way to get it without obscuring the clean lines of the spaces,” she says.

Another strategy was to adopt an Old World approach to furnishing the place: Azario filled the rooms with pieces she had long owned and covered them in fabrics from her line. “I used two tones—natural and white hemp—then had many of the pieces tufted to introduce a bit of softness and traditional styling into the rooms,” she says. There are global layers in the mix, too, with kilims covering chairs, stools, and pillows; tribal tables in the living room and master bedroom; zebra prints repeated throughout; and ethnic art gracing the walls.

Avid cooks and entertainers, Azario and Abram opted for an unapologetically modern kitchen. Clad in stainless steel and cool gray paint and flooded with light, the space is anything but cold. In fact, the dynamic couple have had no trouble luring their friends 40 blocks north to their gracious, welcoming home. “My fear is that Josh is already getting restless,” Azario confides. “Lately he’s been talking about Brooklyn.” □

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The staircase was designed to match the stainless steel countertops in the kitchen. Range, Wolf. Custom counters and cabinetry. OPPOSITE, TOP: Tub, Waterworks. Fittings, Perrin & Rowe. Sinks, Restoration Hardware with custom marble top. Philippe Starck chair, Kartell. OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: Custom console. Walls in Silver Queen, Coronado Gold.

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