ART OF STONE Greg Natale's redesign of a New York City townhouse treads the line between *whimsy and worldly* with sweet sorbet shades, MODERN ART murals and a MAXIMALIST spread of marble.

By FIONA MCCARTHY *Photographed by* ANSON SMART *Styled by* MARIANA MARCKI-MATOS

This page in the formal lounge of this Manhattan home, Sesann **sofa** and **ottoman** in Sacho Elle fabric by Gianfranco Frattini for Tacchini from Matter; vintage wood veneer **side table**; A.D.A **lamp** by Umberto Riva for Tacchini from 1stDibs; **floor** in Bosco collection Ada oak by Greg Natale for Tongue & Groove; Kandinsky **wallpaper mural** from Papiers de Paris. *Details, last pages*.

These pages in another view of the formal lounge, Clam **chairs** by Philip Arctander in timber and sheepskin from Gestalt NYC; Scala leather **stool** (as a table) by Stéphane Parmentier for Giobagnara from 1stDibs; Victoria **chair** by David/Nicolas for Tacchini from Matter; **fireplace** produced by Mondo Marmo Group in Verde Alpi marble; Iris **mirror** from Concrete Cat; Climbing Vine **rug** in Lilac from Nordic Knots; custom **pendant light** by Crizu; **Roman blinds** in Take It Easy sheer fabric from Jab Anstoetz Group.

This page in the kitchen, **bench** and **splashback** produced by Mondo Marmo Group in Calacatta Viola; crown-cut American Oak **cabinets** in veneer stain in Herb Bouquet gloss paint from Benjamin Moore; N°22 **cabinet pulls** in Carbon Black from Mi & Gei; Crue pull-down **tap** in Matte Black from Kohler; Apparatus Trapeze 4 surface mount **light**, enquiries to Criteria; **floor** in Bosco collection Ada oak by Greg Natale for Tongue & Groove. ***Opposite page*** in the hallway, Scala leather **stool** (as a table) by Stéphane Parmentier for Giobagnara from 1stDibs; Odin **sofa** by Konstantin Grcic for ClassiCon; Tiger Knot **rug** in Caramel by Catherine Martin for Designer Rugs; Cassini Rosa **lamp** from Merve Kahraman; Alabaster S01 **ceiling lights** from Allied Maker; **portals** produced by Mondo Marmo Group in Breccia Capria marble.

Leticia Francini's renovated townhouse on Manhattan's Upper East has all the cinematic hallmarks of the little house surrounded by towering skyscrapers in the movie *Up*. Tucked between a barber shop and café, the late 1800s brownstone hardly seems real with its dollhouse proportions, but inside, its wonderland transformation is unexpected and bold. "We love that although it is a small house, it feels so large," says Francini, who divides her time with her husband between Brisbane and Florence, and now New York.

VL50-listed interior designer Greg Natale has reimagined the four-storey townhouse as a jewel box of maximalist modernity, "while staying true to the heritage of the building," Francini says. Until 2019, its ground floor had been home to an eccentric button shop, a treasure trove for A-list shoppers, architects, designers, locals and international tourists alike.

Sticking largely to the existing floorplan — Natale says a redesign in the 1970s laid some good groundwork — the house flows from the ground floor entrance, up a flight of stairs past the main and first guest bedrooms, and then up to where the foyer, lounge, kitchen, dining room and terrace combine seamlessly on one level. There are two more bedrooms and ensuite bathrooms on another floor above. "Each room is large enough to feel very comfortable yet also have its own flair," Francini says.

Old photographs of the residence guided the reintroduction of original doorways, updated with neoclassical stone portals, as well as the renovation of the windows, roof and back of the house. The U-shaped kitchen was reconfigured into a galley to open the space out and "get more light into the house's core," Natale says. Mirrors everywhere amp up glimpses of green from the treetops outside and further bounce light up to the three-metre-plus-high ceilings. Custom banquettes and vanity units fit snugly into the tightest of nooks while the everyday machinations of heating and plumbing have been hidden away behind bulk heads and under windowsills. "That's New York — you have to be clever and use every little space you have."

The couple's initial "pink and green" brief informed the interior scheme's gelato shades and tactile finishes, says Natale, citing the cosseting, seductive mood of Parisian restaurants such as hot nightspot Mondaine de Pariso as inspiration. "I've spent a lot of time in Paris, so I understood the immersive, cocooning warmth they wanted," he says. Francini was also keen to exploit their relationship with the stonemasons in Carrara, Italy (the couple has a villa in nearby Forte dei Marmi). "They just love, love marble," explains Natale.

Layered in deep, pulsating shades of verde, rosso, viola, noir, cioccolato, ochre, plum and rose, every marble detail, from the architraves, edging and fireplaces to elaborately collaged floors and shower walls, was cut in Italy, delivered by container and fitted over several months by stonemasons flown in from Carrara. "I love the richness of natural materials and wanted to feature a variety of marbles throughout the house," Francini says. "It reflects life. We are all made up of different, unusual shades like nature, which is abundantly colourful."

Into the mix of mid-century classics, such as Philip Arctander's Clam chair, Saarinen side tables and a bulbous, squidgy Tacchini Sesann sofa, Natale has married contemporary furniture (Giraffe chairs by Brazilian designer Juliana Lima Vasconcellos, Konstantin Grcic's enveloping Odin sofa for ClassiCon, Dirk van der Kooij's Meltingpot recycled plastic dining table) with modernist lighting. These designs include Square in Circle's Bauhaus-inspired pieces, and works by Australian ceramicist Chardean Chum and Istanbul-born designer Merve Kahraman.

Myriad moments of whimsy echo the couple's love for the art world. In the living room, a mural by French wallpaper company Papiers de Paris (drawn from Vasily Kandinsky's 1930s painting *Deux points verts*) dances with a floral chandelier fashioned by Genovese design duo Crizu from old books; the arms of a candy-hued Murano chandelier in the kitchen look as if spun from sugar; Vincent Darré's surrealist Neofutur headboard adorns the main bedroom; and Fort Makers' Dada-motif handles dress doors and drawers.

Naturally there are the designer's own touches, including Natale's Scala print (used for blinds), and wavy chevron oak flooring, which launches with Tongue & Groove in Australia this autumn. For the high-octane Natale, it was a dream project, and a chance for the designer to draw on his love for 1970s and '80s film, television and fashion to give his signature exuberant style "a new twist". Meanwhile, the ground floor has been turned into "a cool, minimalist New York gallery," Natale says. It serves as a third studio for the couple's Art With Love Foundation's painting classes and workshops (held regularly in Brisbane and Florence, and free to all).

It is "the blend of texture, pattern and colour, combined with distinctive pieces" that has made it such an interesting but inviting home, says Francini. Take the main bedroom, the townhouse's piéce de resistance, elongated by the addition of a walk-in wardrobe (replacing an old sun parlour), reminiscent of a luxury fashion store's changing room. "Now it feels massive, like being in Doctor Who's Tardis," she laughs. With Verde Alpi marble slabs framing the hanging space, each one individually sculpted to reflect the lyrical shapes of the Matisse-inspired mural lining the adjoining hallway, the room "is so unique in and of itself," Francini enthuses. "To be among the creative flair of all these people who are so passionate about what they are creating makes us feel part of something very special." ■ *gregnatale.com*

This page in the dining room, Meltingpot **table** by Dirk van der Kooij; Giraffe **chairs** by Juliana Lima Vasconcellos from The Invisible Collection; Barovier&Toso Murano glass **chandelier** from 1stDibs; **Roman blinds** in Take It Easy sheer fabric from Jab Anstoetz Group; **artwork** by Marisa Purcell.

These pages in the main bedroom, Neofutur **headboard** by Vincent Darré and Giraffe **chair** by Juliana Lima Vasconcellos from The Invisible Collection; Kolmiojalka **bench** from Ornäs; Pipistrello **lamp** by Gae Aulenti from Martinelli Luce; Tangent 5 **pendant light** from Allied Maker; Cone **ceiling lights** by Michael Anastassiades, enquiries to Mobilia; White Blossom **wallpaper** from Iksel; **portals** produced by Mondo Marmo Group in Verde Alpi marble.

This page in a bedroom, Diana **bed** in Camel boucle from CB2; TMBO **chairs** by Mazo Design from 1stDibs; Chouchou **side table** from Pulpo; Judarn upholstered **mirror** from AnthroLiving; **fireplace** produced by Mondo Marmo Group in Verde Alpi marble; Antilocarpa **carpet** in Smoke from Stark; Tangent 3 Torchiere **pendant light** from Allied Maker; Madame **ceiling lights** from Il Fanale; Scala **Roman blinds** in Blush by Greg Natale for Elliott Clarke. ***Opposite page*** in a bathroom, **basin**, **splashback**, **wall** and **floor** produced by Mondo Marmo Group in Verde Alpi marble; **vanity** in 2 Pac polyurethane in Van Alen Green from Benjamin Moore; Parallel wall-mount **mixer tap** from Kohler; Offset **wall light** from Chardean Chum. *Details, last pages.*