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# TAILORED *to* PERFECTION

THANKS TO DESIGNER  
CELERIE KEMBLE, A MANHATTAN COUPLE  
WHO KNEW PRECISELY WHAT THEY  
WANTED ENDED UP WITH MORE THAN THEY IMAGINED

*Text by Ingrid Abramovitch · Photography by William Waldron  
Produced by Anita Sarsidi*

The living room of Jane and Michael DeFlorio's Manhattan townhouse, designed by Celerie Kemble. A 20th-century gilt-wood clock hangs above a custom-made marble mantel; the antique screen is covered in a De Gournay wallpaper, the 19th-century chair is upholstered in a suede by Stark; a Pierre Bonnard painting hangs above a William and Mary japanned cabinet, the armchairs are Art Deco, and the cocktail table is by Yves Klein. See Resources.



**JANE AND MICHAEL DEFLORIO** don't do anything by half measures. The renovation of their Manhattan townhouse was no exception. The couple, who met as graduate students at Harvard Business School, researched 45 homes before purchasing a five-story fixer-upper (exactly what they were seeking) on the Upper East Side.

That was just the beginning. Jane—an investment banker who also has a degree in mechanical engineering—taught herself how to use AutoCAD, the computer-aided professional design and drafting program, so that she could sketch out her dream home. Before bringing in the experts, she and her husband, a private-equity investor, spent numerous weekends hunkered down with floor plans, meticulously plotting out their gut renovation. “We’re the obsessive couple,” Jane admits. “We both get into it.”

By the time their design team—decorator Celerie Kemble, architect Marina Lanina, and contractor Felix Flit—came on board, the DeFlorios

had assembled a 50-page presentation outlining their plans to the nth degree. Included were spreadsheets tallying how many parties they host per year, with guest counts, and, for closet-design purposes, the number of handbags that Jane owns, the heights of her boots, and the hanging measurements of both his and her clothing. As for decor, they had collected 500 inspirational images of interiors, furnishings, and art, which they had sorted by room.

Some design professionals would have been daunted, but everyone involved agrees that the DeFlorios won them over with enthusiasm, energy, and sheer niceness. And since Jane was newly pregnant with twin boys, the couple weren't interested in wasting anyone's time. “They were consistent, deliberate, and informed,” Kemble says. “And they really dove in with amazing antiques and art.”

The renovation was extensive. The 19th-century façade of the brick townhouse was saved, but the interior was completely rebuilt into a



home that combines classical architectural elements with such modern amenities as central air-conditioning and an elevator. The original truncated staircase was replaced with a gently curving, continuous grand stairway. In the end, a renovation that could easily have taken two to three years was completed in just 15 months.

Jane, a decorating buff, had a vision for every space in her home: an Asian-accented dining room in red lacquer, a dressy living room with a touch of Fortuny, a family-friendly kitchen, a black entry. But while she had strong opinions, she welcomed Kemble's input. "We would argue back and forth," Kemble says, "but she listened. She wasn't rigid."

Jane wanted a gray-and-white master bedroom modeled on fashion designer Christian Dior's iconic Parisian salon; Kemble complied with a scheme of gray suede walls and coordinating silk De Gournay draperies, but insisted on adding what she calls "rude accents of citrus yellow, just five percent shy of obnoxious." She also talked Jane into purchasing an ornate, mirrored bench for the hall outside her bedroom. "When I saw it at Christie's, I started foaming at the mouth and flapping my wings," says Kemble, who nicknamed it "the Beast." "It's just the kind of thing I love: pointlessly strange, quirky, chinoiserie-meets-Dorothy-Draper gone bonkers."





In the lacquered dining room, original and reproduction Jansen chairs upholstered in a Lee Jofa velvet surround a table by Oscar de la Renta; the giltwood chandelier is early 19th century, and the Samarkand rug is from Doris Leslie Blau. **FACING PAGE:** The artworks in the living room include etchings by Renoir and Modigliani, and the carved-wood console is Italian. See Resources.



The DeFlorios' budget allowed for the purchase of a few serious antiques. Once again, they left nothing to chance, hiring a trained appraiser, Jennifer Garland Ross, to help in the search. She worked in tandem with Kemble, scouring auctions and dealers for decorative furnishings and tapping into her network of fabricators and restorers. "Jane wanted a period chandelier for the dining room, a cabinet on a stand, and wonderful accessories, like the rock-crystal eggs I had made in Brazil," Ross says.

That cabinet proved an adventure. Ross discovered the perfect lacquered specimen—a late-17th-century William and Mary japanned piece—in the online catalog of a Dallas auction house. Both Jane and Kemble were enthusiastic, but, unfortunately, it turned out to have been sold. Undaunted, Ross called the auction house and learned that the purchaser had 35 days to pay for the cabinet—this was day 34 and the bill had yet to be paid. That's when Jane remembered that her husband was en route to a business meeting in Dallas. "She called me and I said, 'What, are you kidding?'" Michael says. "But my hotel turned out to be less than two miles away, so I went to look. Jane asked, 'What style is it?' I told her it looked Asian to me. 'What color?' 'Greenish-blue,' I said. She told me to hold up a dollar bill next to it, to compare the color, and I e-mailed some pictures that I took with my BlackBerry."

In fact, the cabinet was a gorgeous teal—rare for the period and, wouldn't you know, the exact shade Kemble had chosen as a complement to the living room's cream palette. The very next day, Ross was on a plane to Dallas with a magnifying glass and a check in her pocket. ■



The walls of the master bedroom are covered in suede, the Louis XVI-style bergère is by Jansen, and the bedside table is a James Mont design; the shagreen headboard is custom made, the coverlet is by Pratesi, and the painting is by Betsy Eby. **FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** In a hallway, the mirrored, faux-marble banquette was purchased at Christie's; the wall covering is by De Gournay. A pair of French zinc finials in the master bath; the tub is by Waterworks, the fittings are by Lefroy Brooks, and the painting is by Yolanda Sanchez. The dressing room painting is by André Dunoyer de Segonzac, and the chandelier and sconces are by Visual Comfort & Co. See Resources.