



HOBOKEN HAVEN

Needing studio space, a family leaves Manhattan and remodels a brownstone across the river

WHEN RICHARD PASQUARELLI GAVE HIS MOTHER A TOUR OF HIS new home she couldn't hide her dismay. "What have you done?" she asked. Her reaction wasn't a surprise. It had taken a lot of imagination for Pasquarelli and his wife, Valerie Pels, to see the Hoboken brownstone's potential after years of benign neglect and clutter. These days, their home

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HOMEOWNERS Richard Pasquarelli and Valerie Pels (opposite) with son, Matthew, and daughter, Catherine, in front of their retooled brownstone. ■ The unusual terrazzo tile floor and carved marble fireplace surround — original to the house — distinguish the foyer (opposite). **SOURCES:** mirror, MDC International in New York City; floral arrangement, Cut 1 Floral Design in Hoboken. ■ The exposed brick and beams are part of the unfinished look that Richard Pasquarelli wanted for his studio. The floor is recessed because the ceiling could not be raised to the height needed for the lighting.



SLEEK FURNISHINGS and modern art (above) play against original architectural details in the turn-of-the-century home. The fragile parquet floors — too thin to be sanded again — grace the living and dining areas. **SOURCES:** dining table, chairs, and buffet, Ligne Roset in New York City; Richard Pasquarelli painting, Luxe Gallery in New York City; Norm 69 paper chandelier (from a kit), Unicahome.com.

■ The new powder room (right) adjacent to the kitchen makes the most of the tight space, about 2½ by six feet. The vessel sink rests atop a nightstand. **SOURCES:** vessel bowl and Rohl faucet, George Taylor Specialties in New York City; nightstand and mirror, Crate and Barrel in New York City; soap dish and towel ring, Restoration Hardware.

■ The open floor plan created by the addition at the back of the house required an integration of old and new. The living room (opposite) is next to the kitchen because the owners love to cook and entertain. To facilitate serving, the two rooms are divided by a peninsula. It is partially hidden by the 1926 Steinway piano that once belonged to Pasquarelli's parents. **SOURCES** (all New York City except as noted): couch, Ligne Roset; coffee table bench, Design Within Reach; woven PVC rug, Aronson's Floor Covering Inc.; Barcelona chair, White Furniture; Richard Pasquarelli paintings, Luxe Gallery; floral arrangement, Cut 1 Floral Design in Hoboken.





inspires a different reaction. In little more than a year, Pasquarelli and Pels converted the turn-of-the-century row house into a stylish home that suits their unique needs. "My mother was bowled over when we finished," Pasquarelli said. The longtime city dwellers began house-hunting in part so Pasquarelli could have a home studio. Pasquarelli, who works in advertising, is

also a serious artist. He had been spending off-hours painting in a rented art studio a distance from the couple's downtown Manhattan loft. Pels and their children, eight-year-old Matthew and six-year-old Catherine, missed him.

And while the family loved Manhattan, where Pels is a law clerk for a Supreme Court justice and the children attend pri-



vate school, they knew it would be difficult to find something suitable in the city. Then one Sunday they spotted an ad for a Hoboken brownstone.

The rest, as they say, is history.

Despite the neglect, the four-level house built during the late 1800s retained many original features. Elegant plasterwork adorns the walls and ceilings of the public areas.

There are nine fireplaces, including one with an intricately carved marble mantel. The foyer floor is terrazzo tile, a rarity in Hoboken brownstones. Other eye-catching details include parquet floors, shutters on the front windows, and stained-glass pocket doors to close off the living room.

A great deal of work was needed, however. There was no space with the proper



DARK TILE FLOORS, sleek stainless-steel appliances, and honed-granite countertops accent the spacious kitchen (opposite and lower left photos), which is modeled after an English butler's pantry. The peninsula that separates the kitchen from the living room serves as a buffet when entertaining; the second peninsula is not only ideal for multiple cooks, but also provides storage on both sides. **SOURCES:** Crossville porcelain floor tile, NEMO Tile in New York City; Wolf range, Wolf hood, and custom cabinetry, Oberg and Lindquist in Westwood; cabinet hardware, Restoration Hardware; Rohl farmhouse sink and Hamat faucet, George Taylor Specialties in New York City; flowers on peninsula, Cut 1 Floral Design in Hoboken.

■ The home's original bay window has been reinterpreted in the informal dining area (above) at the back of the kitchen. A bank of windows beneath a peaking glass roof brightens the space and provides an overview of the small garden behind the brownstone.



Photos from homeowner



HIS AND HER CLOSETS (one shown above) flank the fireplace in the master bedroom. SOURCE: Richard Pasquarelli painting, Luxe Gallery in New York City.
 ■ The fireplace — now recessed — had jutted into the master bedroom (top right) before the closets were added.
 ■ The master bath was overdue for an update (center right).
 ■ Architect Peter Johnston eliminated a closet and borrowed space from an adjacent room for the master bath (right). SOURCES: Lefroy Brooks thermostat showerhead, St. Thomas Creations sink, Toto toilet, and Perrin & Rowe faucet, George Taylor Specialties in New York City; tile, NEMO Tile in New York City; sconces, mirror, tissue holder, soap dish, cup, toothbrush holder, and towel bars, all Restoration Hardware.



After Back



Before Back



Before Front

Photos from Benchmark



After Front

AN IRON STAIRCASE was added to make the garden (above) at the back of the home accessible from the kitchen. The exterior of the addition, built by Stackpole Construction in Rivervale, is designed to meld with the existing structure. SOURCE: architecture, Peter Johnston, Architect.

- The back of the house (top right) changed dramatically with the addition of the studio as well as improvements to the landscape.

- The front of the home, although dingy when purchased (center right), had beautiful details.

- A cleaning late in 2004 brightened the front of the brownstone (right).

dimensions for an art studio. The kitchen and dining room were on the ground floor. The house was gloomy and insular.

Enter architect Peter Johnston, whose offices are a short walk away.

"It was not well-suited to a modern family's needs," said Johnston, whose firm is Peter Johnston, Architect, PC. One goal "was to bring the outdoors in. They wanted to relate to the out-of-doors."

The couple also wanted a suitable space for entertaining (both love to cook) and the all-important art studio tailored to Pasquarelli's needs; using glossy oil enamel, he executes large contemporary canvases based on his photos.

The first step was to remove a shed-like structure leading to the tiny back yard and replace it with a two-story addition. The new space houses Pasquarelli's roomy art studio on the ground level.

GOING UP

One floor up in the addition, on the first-floor/parlor level, there is a kitchen with an octagonal eating area situated under a pyramid-like glass ceiling. (The existing parts of this level contain the entry hall, dining room, and living room.)

Other improvements at this point were updating the heating and cooling systems, and adding a tiny powder room near the kitchen.

The next step was to reconfigure the existing space. Because Pels and Pasquarelli like to chat with guests as they prepare dinner, the living room was placed next to the new kitchen; the dining room is in a space at the front of the house. The result is an open area that stretches from the foyer through to the back of the house and blends the old architecture with the new.

"The challenge with such a small space [the brownstone is only 16 feet, eight inches wide] is to provide interesting geometry on a tight site and to

integrate the historic with the modern elements," said Johnston, an American Institute of Architects member.

One example: He designed the addition so that the curves of an existing archway frame the view into the modern kitchen. And the octagonal breakfast area is a nod to the bay windows that originally defined the back of the house. "The [new] bay is very reminiscent of what was there. You can tell it is new, but it is not jarring," Pasquarelli said.

FLEXIBLE PLANNING

The marriage of old and new was also underscored by playing the sleek lines of modern furnishings against the turn-of-the-century architectural details. The rectangular kitchen, with its clean lines and stainless-steel appliances, features cabinetry modeled after an English butler's pantry that Pasquarelli admired in a book. "We wanted anything built in to be in keeping with the house," he explained. "We wanted it to be flexible if later someone wants to change the décor."

Although most of the focus was on the ground and parlor floors of the home, the couple also modified the master bedroom on the floor above, converting back-to-back closets into their bathroom. Replacement closets were built on each side of the fireplace, adding architectural interest to the large square room. The family room — also on this floor — was outfitted with an entire wall of open cubicles for games, books, DVDs, and family treasures.

SUBTLE COLORS

The couple washed the walls in pale colors that allow the delicate plasterwork to shine as well as provide a subtle backdrop for their extensive art collection. The foyer is a soft coffee color; the dining room, misty gray; the living room, grayish white; and the adjacent kitchen is mid-tone green. The children select-



THE STAIRCASE woodwork (left) was drab before the remodel.

■ A newly reupholstered love seat found at a thrift shop sits beneath the staircase (above) leading to the home's upper two floors. Special lighting has been installed on the stairway to showcase Richard Pasquarelli's artwork.

ed the hues for their rooms. Catherine picked bright pastel pink and Matthew chose a medium blue.

"We spent a lot of time with color because it flows from room to room," Pasquarelli said.

Accent lighting was integrated with natural light throughout the house to showcase Pasquarelli's artwork. The main stairwell serves as a gallery exhibiting his paintings at each level.

BUDGET MOVES

Furnishing the 3,500-square-foot house proved to be an adventure because the majority of pieces that seemed so right in the family's 1,800-square-foot loft were inappropriate for the brownstone. And money was tight after most of the proceeds from selling the loft were channeled into buying and renovating the house.

Pels, who recently learned to sew, made the dining room's silk draperies as well as assorted pillows and cushions.

She and Pasquarelli put their skills as persistent shoppers to work in purchasing other furnishings.

FABULOUS FINDS

Within months, they turned up a line-for-line copy of a Barcelona chair, a sleek white sofa (a floor model), and a glass-and-walnut dining room table and coordinating chairs. The dining room chandelier was purchased online and assembled from a kit. The living room rug that protects the fragile parquet floors was fashioned from four PVC mats. A favorite love seat was reupholstered as were two pleather side chairs purchased for \$150.

"We like to find old pieces and make them new," Pels said. The same might be said of old houses. ■

Judy Jeannin, a regular contributor to Design NJ, writes from her Hillsdale home.

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