

AD

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Tour This Colorful NYC Home by AD100 Designer Giancarlo Valle

Imbuing a newly built town house with a rich aura of history, the daring designer writes his own rules

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Studio Giancarlo Valle conceived a custom burlled-oak table and suite of mahogany chairs for this Manhattan dining room, which is painted in a Farrow & Ball purple; vintage Paavo Tynell lights, Myungjin Kim sculptures (on table) from Salon 94, Claude Conover vessel from Gallery Dobrinka Salzman, and wall-mounted plates by Stephen Bird.

Architects delight in constraints. A sheer cliff, an enormous boulder, some mature trees—every challenge is an opportunity, every obstacle a eureka moment. (Just ask John Lautner, Oscar Niemeyer, and Lina Bo Bardi.) Where others might see cumbersome red tape in the form of setback requirements and height restrictions, architects see puzzling frameworks in which to work their creative magic.



Valle in the space.



Bespoke brushed-oak shelves and seating in the library; 1970s table and Pierre Chapo chair from Magen H Gallery.

Enlisted by a creative couple to update their Manhattan town house, AD100 talent Giancarlo Valle found no such conditions to navigate. Recently constructed and lacking in character, the five-story downtown dwelling was just box rooms, white walls, and soulless developer details—an aesthetic vacuum, for all intents and purposes. And so, deprived of any natural jumping-off points, Valle created his own. “A project like this, it’s a blank canvas,” he reflects. “You almost have to create the game.”



Creamy Moroccan tile sheaths the hearth in the living room, which is anchored by a custom Studio Giancarlo Valle sofa; lounge chairs by Green River Project and Bode, vintage Philip and Kelvin Laverne cocktail table, paintings by Martin Kippenberger (left) and Robert Bittenbender.

The result is a tapestry of tantalizing rooms that unfolds to dynamic and delightful effect—moment to moment, mood to mood. In some cases, the starting point was the palette, whether the dining room’s allover aubergine or the primary bedroom’s enveloping navy. “The clients had strong opinions about color,” Valle notes. “Together we pushed it even further, building a story around these elemental bursts.” In other instances, a piece of furniture became the driving force. The living room, for example, began with a J-shaped sofa in custom-dyed blue mohair whose gigantic form had to be brought in piece by piece. Valle mixed it with a Franz West chain-link floor lamp, a Philip and Kelvin LaVerne cocktail table, and a pair of lounge chairs commissioned from Green River Project and Bode. Says Valle: “Every room and every detail had to be solved on its own.”

That case-by-case strategy could, in less experienced hands, have yielded a patchwork of dissonant vibes, more fun house than dream house. But Valle deftly stitched the spaces together, using handcrafted details and custom creations as exquisite common thread. Everywhere the mark of the artisan is present. For the living room, Valle enlisted the Brooklyn-based decorative finishers Kamp Studios to texture the walls with fine plaster. Jordan McDonald, a Philadelphia ceramic artist, collaborated on the richly patinated pulls that appear on closet doors and bathroom vanities. Traditional Moroccan zellige tile forms its own through line, wrapping hearths in the living and dining rooms and sinks in powder rooms. Layers upon layers of sculpted cement, meanwhile, transformed what had been a blah staircase into a breathtaking centerpiece.



In the primary bedroom, Ingo Maurer table lamps, 1970s Pierre Paulin chairs, and a custom bed dressed in a John Derian coverlet; painting by Ernst Yohji Jaeger.

But the foundations of every room are Valle's own bespoke designs, among them signature wavy-back barstools and, for each of the two children's rooms, sinuous shelving. The den, just off the entry, reveals refined brushed-oak millwork and a wraparound sofa upholstered in Dedar bouclé. In the dining room, a showstopper table of burlled oak can accommodate upwards of 20 for weekly Shabbat dinners, its form pinching at the center, with huge knots enlivening its surface. It is surrounded by playful hand-carved chairs, each bearing a cutout in the form of an agave plant—a nod to the clients' thirst for tequila. The breakfast area's new built-in corner cabinets, meanwhile, are an homage to Le Corbusier, inspired by those at the iconic Unité d'Habitation social housing complex in Marseille.



In the breakfast area, 1960s Pierre Chapo chairs surround an antique trestle table; pendants by Natalie Page, painting by Yulia Iosilzon from Carvalho park, and an antique wooden mortar from RW Guild.

“The doorknob relates to the chair relates to the room,” Valle notes of his own ambitious holistic approach, influenced by design heroes like Corbu, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Josef Hoffmann. The last especially resonated for this project, with subtle allusions to be found in the tilework’s simple grids and the dining room’s exacting wall trim and incorporated storage. “We were looking a lot at the Vienna Secession, the architecture of 1920s Austria,” Valle explains. “There was always a motif, always a theme, always personality behind the proportions. That’s the way we treat projects. We consider things top to bottom.”