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Plastered

Stephen Antonson & Kathleen Hackett, Boerum Hill

There was nothing charming about the brick row house Stephen Antonson and Kathleen Hackett moved into several years ago—apart from the company it kept on a handsome tree-lined street. It seemed that the mission of the former owner, who had lived there for almost forty years, was to rid the place of anything that required care and maintenance. Character was among the most serious casualties, but the pair knew they could handily build it back up. Put plaster of Paris and paint in the right hands and even the most banal spaces can be transformed. Antonson, an artist and designer whose plaster furnishings, lighting, and accessories are sought after by A-list interior designers around the world, can't help but bring his work home. "He is quite compulsive in general, but it works out to be a lovely compulsion, because we've ended up with a house filled with beautiful pieces Stephen's made himself," says Hackett. Antonson admits, however, that his passion can at times border on obsession. When his wife and two sons were away one summer, he decided to paint an elaborate labyrinthine pattern on the deeply unappealing hallway floor. He sketched it using miles of painter's tape in the method of Harold with his purple crayon. "That was the fun part. It was like making a painting on the floor, but within the confines of architecture," says Antonson. —Matt Austin

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Calm, Cool, and Collected

Quy Nguyen, Fort Greene

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Quy Nguyen lives on the third floor of a brownstone built in 1901, which suits him to a tee, given that he is enamored of all things aged, storied, and special. "I chase the old because there's a past to unravel, a fascinating conversation to have. When you buy new things, there's not much of that," says Nguyen. A creative consultant for some of the world's top lifestyle brands, Nguyen spends his days developing and directing photo shoots of furnishings and accessories, which inevitably informs how he lives at home. "So much passes through my hands at work that I am constantly refining what I want to live with," he says. He considers himself a minimalist hoarder, rotating out pieces when he finds a better version. "I always look for the highest execution of the simplest piece. I much prefer things that have been made with the fewest possible resources. They're more interesting and to me, more beautiful."

So how does someone who describes himself as aesthetically wide open remain rigorous when it comes to living with things he loves? "I see myself as a custodian rather than a collector," says Nguyen. "It's a bit like running a museum. I put things in my home to start a dialogue." And the conversation is constantly evolving, except in the otherwise prosaic kitchen, where gleaming pots and pans are artfully arranged on the stove. The cookware tells the most personal and unchanging story; Nguyen's mother, who ran a restaurant in Saigon before it fell, refused to cook in anything but copper. "I inherited her love of cooking and her taste for beauty and quality."

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Bohemian Rhapsody

Juliana Merz & Harry Cushing, Dumbo

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"There is no plan. A plan is too static," says Juliana Merz of the primary interior design principle she shares with her partner, Harry Cushing. A quick scan of their loft, one of eighty spaces in a former munitions factory, makes it clear that the two artists practice what they preach. Who else could pull off a drippy Italian blown-glass chandelier suspended over a contemporary dining table in a room fitted out with drapes made from drop cloths? "I always envision our place as being inhabited by a decadent old lady," laughs Merz. That is, one who doesn't mind banging pipes and a little water. "We live with leaks galore—the buckets are always out—but it's worth it," says Cushing. The pair, who are as enamored of decay as they are of indulgence, say their approach boils down to just three simple tenets: scale (sometimes slightly wrong is best), contrast (put something precious next to something beautiful but worthless), and tension (pair attractive with unattractive pieces). "My best paintings are the ones that I have to make with the awful browns that are left when I run out of my favorite colors," says Merz.

Limitations fuel their creativity as much as their imaginations. "Sometimes we come up with the weirdest color scheme we can think of and try to make it work," says Cushing. "The space reminds us of a Sicilian palazzo." And they would know: Cushing was born in Rome, and Merz lived in Florence for fifteen years. These days, they decamp to Lucca each summer to escape the Brooklyn heat. "Muccia Prada is a huge inspiration to us. She's into the whole decadent haggly look," says Merz. German director Rainer Werner Fassbinder is another influence. "Our place looks like the hotel in his film *Beware of a Holy Whore*," says Cushing. "It's a little bit ugly."



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Page 159: Gissinger's photograph of an exploding cake, part of a series, hangs in the entryway. Neutrals inspired by nature—shells, stones, bones—make up the predominant palette throughout the house.

Pages 160 and 161: Mr. and Mrs. Feather, left. The kitchen island, at right, was a dinner table in a previous apartment; Li added casters and a marble top to better suit the open space.

Opposite: Gissinger and Li, seated to his left, love a crowded dinner table, including the family parakeets and Noah, their maitipo. Li designed the chandelier, a steel rim lined with self-adhesive LEDs, and had it fabricated locally.

Pages 164–165: Gissinger shot the black-and-white sky as well as the unframed photograph of Li and her daughter that hangs atop the piano, a Craigslist find.

Pages 166 and 167: Apart from a coat of Benjamin Moore's Super White and a few towel hooks, Li left the bathroom walls bare; the vintage cast-iron tub came with the house. A stump hauled back from a weekend in upstate New York serves as Son's bedside table. Gissinger fashioned the reading light from a stick and a clamp fixture.

Pages 168 and 169: Pom-pom garlands from Li's native Peru inject a jolt of color in the master bedroom, left. Along one kitchen wall, storage and laundry's shamelessly blend to create a backdrop for the boys' artwork, right.

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