

notquitewhite

Amid the chaos of Manhattan, this keep-it-simple duplex offers homey elegance—family style.



this is not white," insists designer Gustavo Martinez, sitting in what appears to the naked eye to be the white dining room of an East Side duplex. "No," agrees architect Amanda Martocchio, "these walls are actually China White."

It may seem like a hair-splitting distinction, but when you're working with white, Martinez says, the slightest variation in tone can change everything. "A pure white would have been glaring," he says, "but the China White, which has just a hint of gray, is very serene."

Which is exactly what his clients wanted. "I want to come home to a sanctuary that's spare, quiet and clean," says the owner. With two daughters under the age of 4, she and her husband needed a child-friendly apartment;

because they entertain often, they required a space that would work for adult get-togethers as well. Collaborating for the first time, Martocchio and Martinez, along with project manager Gary Cruz, created a home that suits their clients perfectly.

Because the apartment had great bones and a well-conceived layout, Martocchio didn't have to change the floor plan significantly. She did create a large opening between the dining and living rooms, then raised and widened doorways. She designed simple moldings and paneled the stairway in white to visually connect the upper and lower floors.

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To keep the look spare and the contrast high, designer Gustavo Martinez chose walnut blinds. Architect Amanda Martocchio simplified the fireplace surrounds to emphasize their linearity. Tibetan rugs add color to what might otherwise be too austere a palette for a family home.



To achieve exactly the tone he wanted for the wood floors, Martinez ordered the original oak stripped and restained with three coats of a custom blend of walnut and ebony. The effect is rich and dramatic. "The contrast between the dark floors and the white walls," he says, "makes the furniture show up like art."

That furniture is mostly antique, but a lot of it was tweaked in one way or another to create an entirely modern look. Reddish wood tables were stripped and refinished in black. Pedigreed pieces were reupholstered in cream, oatmeal and taupe. Simple designs were made even simpler. "Even the tone-on-tone print on two of the chairs was a stretch for me," says the apartment's owner. "I like old things, but I don't like anything fussy that looks like it belongs in a grandmother's house."

No chance of that here, even in the cozy master bedroom. The contemporary bed and an antique English dresser's dark tones stand out dramatically against the Benjamin Moore paint choices: China White used on the walls and Super White on the ceilings.

There is pure white to be found in the apartment, Martinez points out: Donald Kaufman Collection's DKC #5. It was critical in the windowless halls and in the kitchen, the darkest room. "For brightening a dark space," explains Martocchio, "sometimes nothing but pure, strong white will do." **mh**

See Resources, last pages.



The kitchen lamp (above) was originally green; like the formerly blue-legged table beneath it, it was stripped for a more modern feel. In the dining room (opposite, below), an antique lamp and sea grass matting add texture. The bedroom mantel is one of few light-wood elements in the apartment.