


ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL DESIGN AUTHORITY

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An Exclusive Tour of the Star's Bel Air Estate



The
Private World
of
**Elizabeth
Taylor**



The dining area of Tracy and Nick Lehman's New York City apartment, designed by Desai/Chia Architecture, combines a custom-made Corian-top table, 18th-century French chairs, and a grid of typographical prints by Christopher Wool. The chairs in the adjoining media room are by BoConcept. The bamboo floor is by Teragren, and the wall paint is a Benjamin Moore custom blend. For details see Sources.

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INNER SPACE

After doubling the size of their Manhattan loft,
a family of four asks Desai/Chia Architecture
to help set the stage for artful urban living



Pocket doors give way to the media room, which includes a Cassius Deluxe sofa by Innovation and a Zap cocktail table by Piero Lissoni for Cassina. Displayed above the sofa is a work by Gilbert & George.

FOR SOME MANHATTAN COUPLES LIVING DOWNTOWN,

the arrival of children can spell the end of their love affair with urban life. Not so for Tracy and Nick Lehman. “We found that the city actually got better with kids,” says Nick, who, as president of digital for NBC Universal’s Entertainment and Digital Networks division, is in the vanguard of technology and media and is a regular, along with his wife and children, at the city’s many museums, art fairs, and cultural happenings. “It was hard to imagine leaving.” Still, a growing family has certain needs—space chief among them—and after the birth of a daughter (now ten) and a son (now seven), not to mention the accumulation of a wide-ranging collection of contemporary art and design (everything from a work by Gilbert & George to a Jeff Koons beach towel from Target that is mounted like a canvas), their 1,350-square-foot loft began to feel a little cramped. But

moving from their Flatiron District building was never an appealing prospect for this family; the best solution was expansion, and when the adjacent apartment became available, they seized their chance.

Wanting to combine the two units to create the kind of flexible living space that could be both a backdrop for art and a stage for their children’s active lives, the Lehmans turned to Katherine Chia of Desai/Chia Architecture in New York. Though they discovered her after an exhaustive Internet search, a brief phone conversation revealed that she was the same Katherine they knew as their downstairs neighbor—a bit of serendipity that would prove useful when it came to coordinating the 18-month renovation with the building. Chia had also worked for a time with the landscape artist and architect Maya Lin, so the Lehmans would be well served when it came



FROM TOP: The living room's Algae wall installation, designed by Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec for Vitra, was assembled by the Lehman family with the help of artist Jason Grunwald; the Swept sofas are by Blu Dot, and the shag rug is from ABC Carpet & Home. The cushioned banquette was made by Desai/Chia.

The kitchen's upper cabinets feature custom-made Häfele doors of anodized aluminum and acrylic; the lower cabinetry is Corian. The dishwasher is by Bosch, the Elio sink fittings are by Dornbracht, and the barstools are by Lapalma.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The study's aluminum shelving by Rakks overlooks an Eames-designed swivel chair by Herman Miller. The photographs on either side of the study entry are by Dorte Alstrup (left) and Tetsugo Hyakutake; the doors and sliding window are by PK-30 System. A DeLonghi oven is integrated into the Corian kitchen island; the range is by Viking.



In the master bath, the walls and floor are tiled in Veneto glass from Stone Source. The Cube tub by Wetstyle has Dornbracht fittings, and the mirrored medicine cabinets are by Robern. **OPPOSITE, FROM TOP:** The master bedroom features a Lumeo bed by Ligne Roset; the nightstands are by Blu Dot, the Brazo reading light is by Pablo Designs, and the bench is by CB2. The hall's inset LED lights are by Louis Poulsen; the photograph displayed at the end is *Herrenchiemsee* by Dieter Rehm.

"OUR PLACE IS ALL ABOUT USABILITY AND FAMILY," TRACY LEHMAN SAYS.

to their goal of establishing a dialogue between the home's structural design and their art collection. Case in point: the Dieter Rehm photograph that architect and clients agreed should hang at the end of the Lehmans' prominent central passageway. The ornate Bavarian palace corridor captured in the piece gives the impression that the hall goes on forever—a quite intentional play on perspective.

Creating a composed, meditative home meant cutting down on clutter, which is no small achievement with two young children in residence. "To live minimally you need ample, well-organized storage space," says Chia. Hence, shelves reach to the ceilings ("we use a lot of ladders," Tracy confesses), closets are slipped into what would otherwise be forgotten corners, and kitchen appliances can be tucked away inside illuminated cabinets. As for the kids' toys, puzzles, paintings, and clothing sketches (the daughter is a fashion designer in the making), these are relegated to a generously sized playroom that can be closed off with a set of opaque-glass doors when things get messy.

Bamboo floors and Corian—liberally used for countertops, sinks, even the dining table—add to the apartment's cool, airy feel, but also underscore another key component of the design: durability. The Lehmans went so far as to cover all the furnishings in fabrics

that can be quickly cleaned, so whether it's the two living room sofas from Blu Dot or the dining chairs inherited from Nick's great-aunt, all now dressed in synthetic leather, nothing is off-limits to children. The space that might be the setting for an elegant cocktail party is the same one where their son, a budding baseball star, can freely practice diving catches of pretend fly balls.

Perhaps nothing in the apartment is more emblematic of this laid-back attitude than the large organic-looking installation displayed across the living room's main wall, a work composed of hundreds of interlocking plastic pieces created by the French industrial-design duo Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec. Assembled by the entire Lehman clan with the help of an artist friend, it has become a family project they encourage guests to reach out and interact with. "If the kids are running around it sort of shakes," Nick says. "People will go, 'Oh gosh,' but if it fell down on the floor we'd pick it back up and put it together in a different way."

Adds Tracy, "Friends walk into the apartment with their children and immediately tell them, 'Don't touch anything!' I say, 'Jump on the couch, run through the halls'—this place is all about usability and family." Such ease and openness is infectious. "It takes about two minutes," Tracy says, "and then there are kids racing everywhere." □



THE FLOOR PLAN

Desai/Chia Architecture combined two modest-size apartments to create a flexible, family-friendly home for the Lehmans.

