

Urban Townhouses Lighten Up

See how three townhouses in the city capture the open-space feel of the suburbs with their architecture, design and views



John Hill May 30, 2012

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The differences between single-family houses in the suburbs and in the city may be great in terms of form and massing, but in many ways they are very similar. They provide the same types of rooms — living rooms, dining rooms, kitchens, bedrooms, bathrooms, etc. And they use layouts that maximize sun and views. But their different contexts mean that suburban houses are low and spread out, while city houses are compact and vertical.

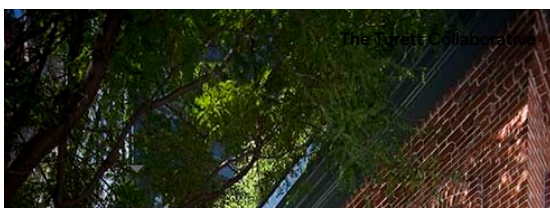
Both suburban and urban houses yearn for some sort of outdoor space, but of course the former usually have much more of that than the latter. And while suburban open space is suited to children and their recreation, city parks also serve this function, giving urban terraces a different role.

This article examines three townhouses from the outside to the inside, with an eye on how they fit into the city — and give their occupants a valuable bit of open space.



Tribeca is one of Manhattan's richest and most desirable neighborhoods, full of landmark buildings, many of them brick warehouses with large windows.

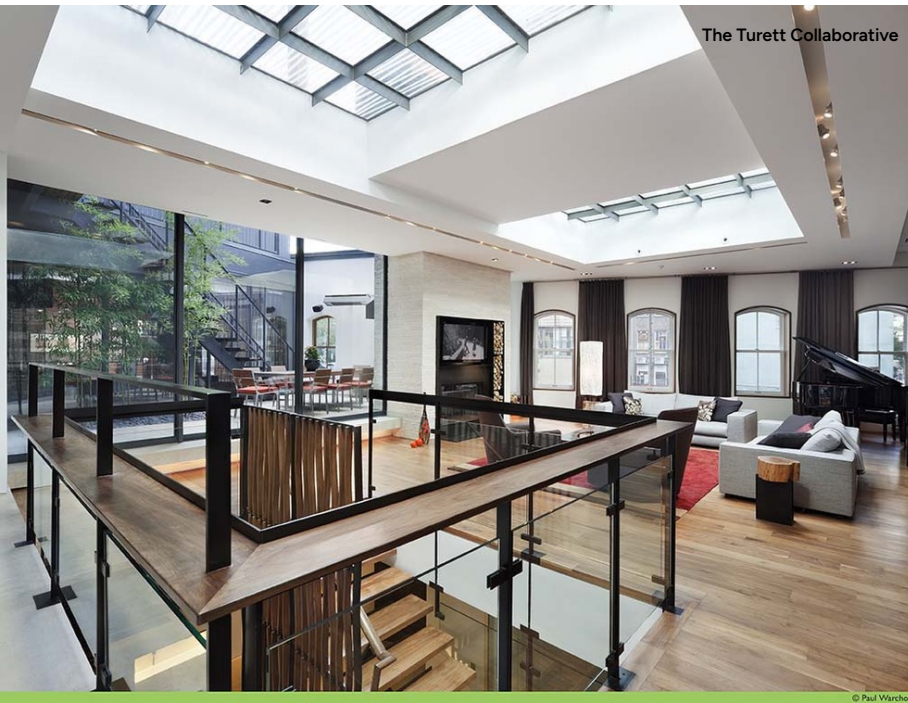
This building stock has influenced many new developments, including this townhouse designed by Turett Collaborative Architects, to embrace large windows instead of all-glass facades, as is the case in other parts of Manhattan.



The Tribeca Townhouse adds four stories to an existing two-story building. It is a huge project by New York City standards (six bedrooms, seven baths), but the articulation of



the exterior gives the impression that it is two buildings — a six-story mass and a two-story piece on the corner.



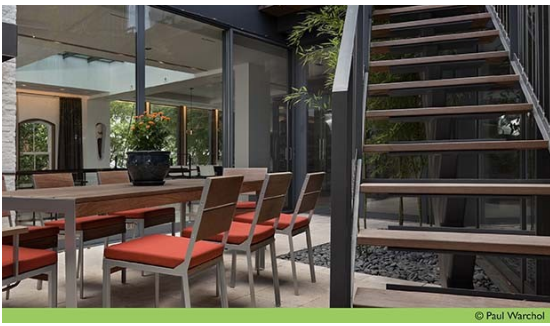
The Turett Collaborative

The architects took advantage of the low existing building to create a roof deck, but they also carved an opening into the second floor to create a terrace adjacent to the living area, seen here. Skylights help to bring sunlight into the living space and lower floor.



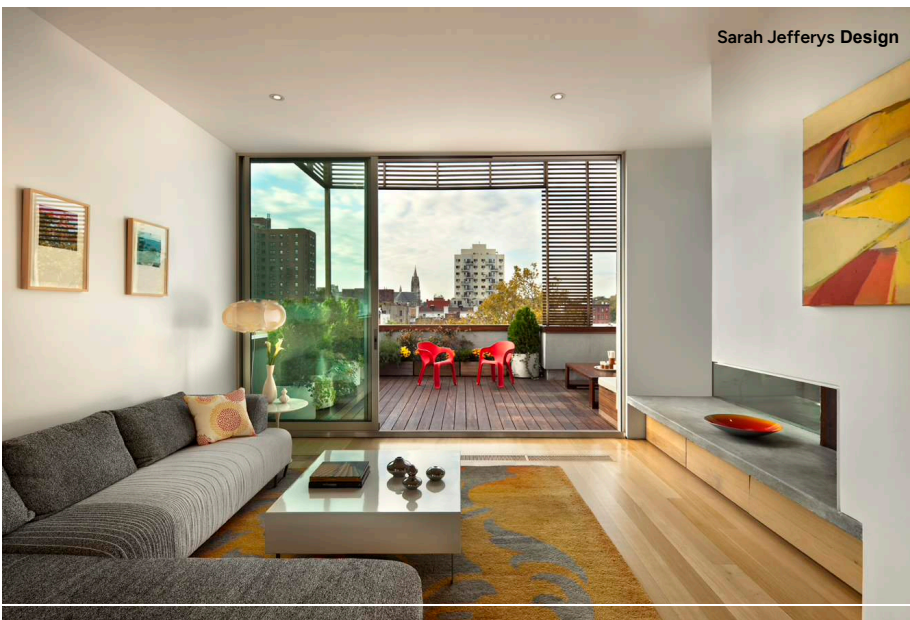
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Stairs from the carved-in terrace provide access to the roof deck, where residents can dine, sunbathe or do whatever else they like, knowing the windows overlooking the roof are their own.



Across the East River in Brooklyn is this townhouse designed by Sarah Jeffreys Design. It is located in the Boerum Hill neighborhood, a desirable location south of downtown Brooklyn and not too far from the borough's Prospect Park, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted.

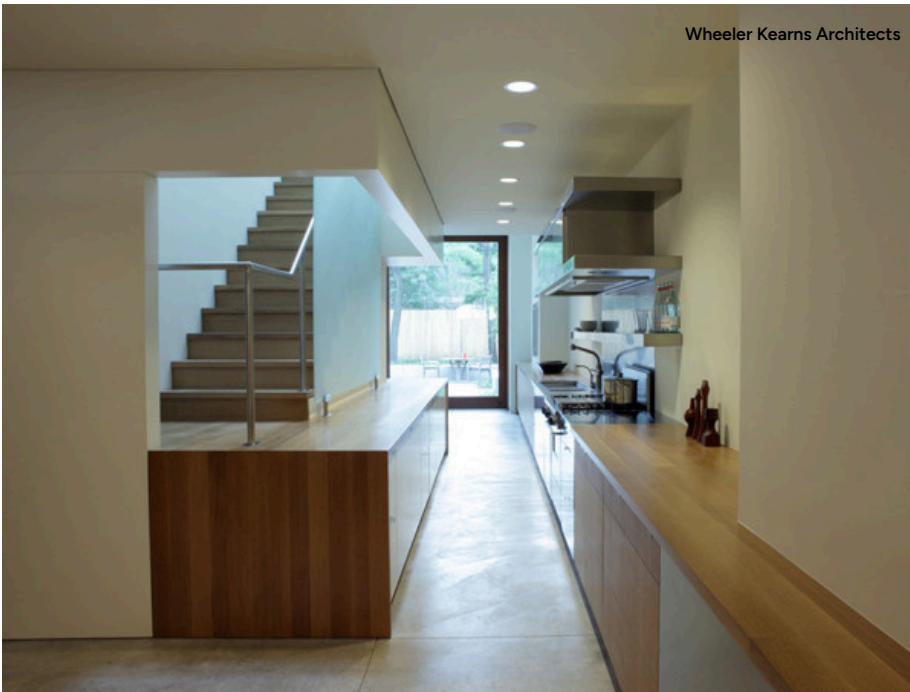
The four-story residence is quite modern in its appearance, with large windows, metal cladding and wood slats set back from the front facade. The top floor is most intriguing: A roof deck for the residents is highlighted through a frame of wood slats.



A living room tops the building and sits adjacent to the roof deck. A sliding wall unites the interior and the south-facing exterior. The wood slats help to frame the distant view, but they also shade the interior from the setting sun.



The third townhouse is in Chicago's Old Town neighborhood, north of downtown, between the Gold Coast and Lincoln Park. The area is full of charming old wood-frame houses, including this one dating back to the 1870s. Wheeler Kearns Architects renovated the house, maintaining the front (per landmark guidelines), removing a two-story rear addition from the 1980s and gutting the interior.



The architects created a very open plan, using the vertical circulation to help bring natural light into the center of the house. Here we can see through the kitchen toward the rear of the house.





At the rear of the house it's clear why the two-story addition had to go: A sizable outdoor space offsets the loss of enclosed square footage. Large expanses of glass also bring much more daylight into the house than the small, original windows on the front elevation do.