

The Insider: Cobble Hill Gut Maximizes Space and Light With Rear Addition, Modern Bay, Open Stair

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by Cara Greenberg

Interiors & Renovation

Adding a large bay window was one of many tactics in a gut renovation that transformed the building into an owner triplex with a rental unit beneath.



Photo by Edward Caruso

The freedom of being just outside the Cobble Hill Historic District allowed Sarah Jefferys to create what she called “a modern play” on a bay window for the front of a light-challenged, 16-foot-wide row house that had most recently been one of the neighborhood’s few remaining SRO (single-room-occupancy) dwellings.

The large bay window was one of many tactics in a gut renovation that transformed the building into an owner triplex with a rental unit beneath. “We added a two story-extension on the back, which made it both narrow and long, so it was imperative to bring light in from every direction — the front, the back and the top,” said Jefferys, founder of [Sarah Jefferys Design](#), a boutique architecture and interiors firm based in lower Manhattan.



“The client was totally game,” she said, for the distinctive bay window and other contemporary innovations, including a big glass opening on the rear wall of the parlor level and a dramatic floating stair topped with a huge new skylight.

The massive gut also included all new mechanicals, a new kitchen and baths, new wide-plank oak floors throughout and even removal of joists on the parlor floor ceiling in order to raise it. “The house had no original detail and you got the sense it had never been grand. The parlor floor ceilings were bizarrely low,” Jefferys said. Those on the floor above were, oddly, higher, enabling the architects to sacrifice a bit of ceiling height on that level in exchange.





Mahogany casing around the new bay window, coupled with a custom mahogany entry door, gives “a contemporary feel but harks back to more traditional elements,” Jefferys said.



“We were trying to use as much FAR [allowable Floor Area Ratio] as possible at the rear and didn’t want to add it to the front,” Jefferys said. Making a bay window with a wide window seat created useful space without adding square footage.

The large bay was also a way to make the tiny entry and the dining area feel more spacious.



In the owner triplex, the dining room is at the front of the parlor floor, with an open kitchen in the middle and living space at the rear.

The new stair was placed to allow for the creation of full-width rooms at the front and rear of the building.

The rich materials palette in the kitchen includes custom walnut cabinetry and marble countertops and backsplash. Besides pendants over the center island, a bank of light coves provides “a feeling of daylight” in the long interior space, Jefferys said.

Economical standard-size Anderson doors and windows were creatively used throughout the house, with transoms at the rear on the parlor level.

Storage and a new powder room are tucked under the stairs.



“Typically, we’ll do a straight run stair, but here we did a floating stair that turns on the bottom and top,” Jefferys said. “It’s more of a U, cantilevered from the party wall. With a straight run, we wouldn’t have had an entry area or a decent size master bedroom.”

Enlarged floating oak treads with a box detail minimize the gap between the open risers to no more than four inches, an important consideration with young children in the house. “There’s also great shadow play off the treads,” Jefferys pointed out.



The main bedroom retains the rustic ceiling joists of the original construction.



Natural stone tile from Stone Source, in a variety of shapes and sizes, clads the walls and floor of the main bath on the second floor.

Though the bathroom is windowless, concealed cove lighting creates an atmospheric glow that mimics daylight.







The children's rooms and a bright new bath are on the skylit top floor.



The new two-story addition at the rear is stepped so that it is deeper on the garden level, which keeps the lower floor from being in shadow.

[Photos by Edward Caruso]

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