

design anthology

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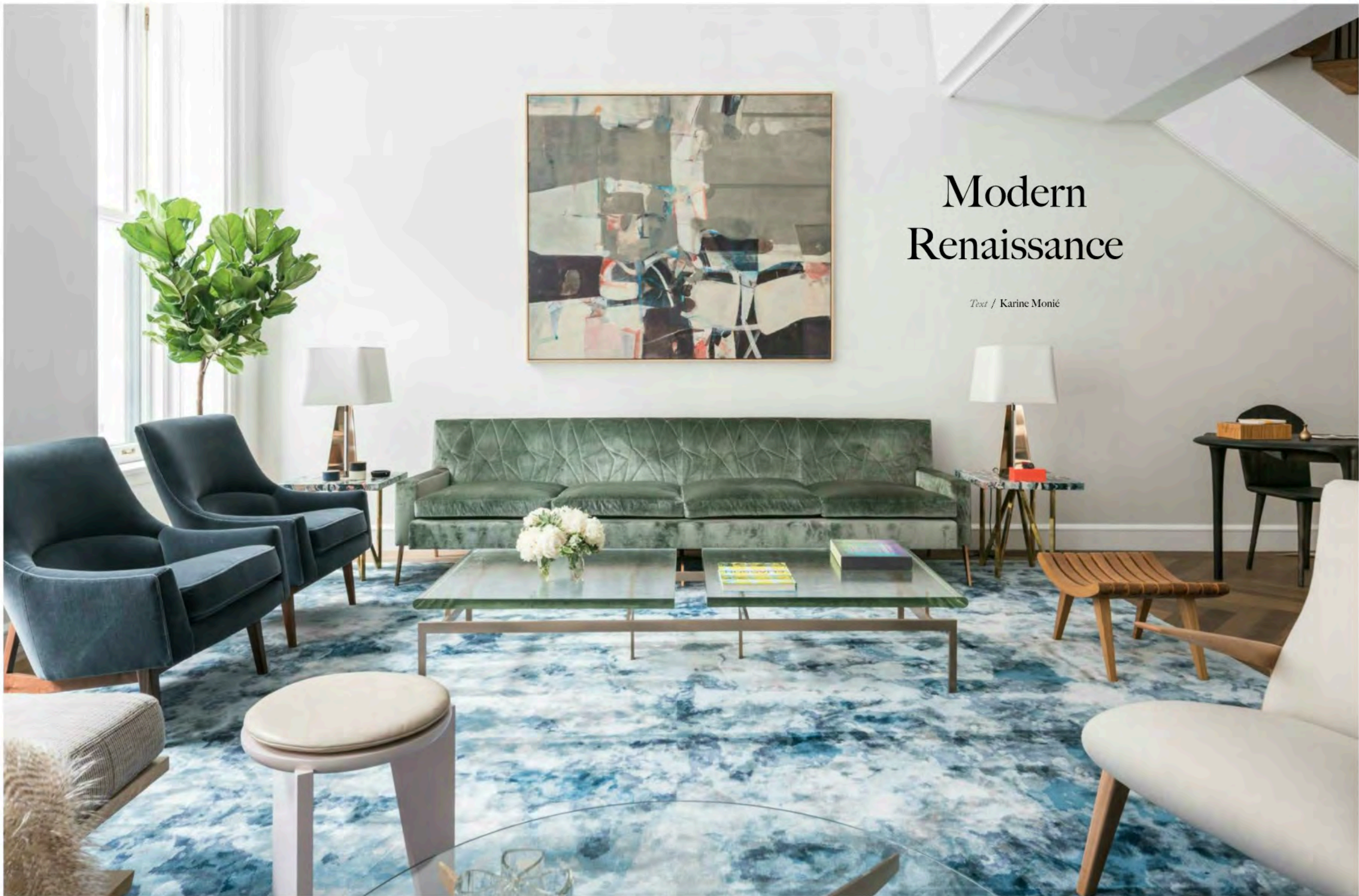


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Modern Renaissance

Text / Karine Monić





On Manhattan's Upper East Side, Michael K Chen's most ambitious project to date is nestled in a 19th-century Neo-Grec building — once a single-family home later divided into 17 apartments and now, thanks to a careful reconstruction by Chen's practice MKCA, reunified into a single-family home once again.

'One of the richest challenges of the project was to engage the history of the building and the context in a meaningful way, and to bond the desire for a contemporary, forward-looking residence to that legacy,' says Chen. 'Our primary strategy really became about craft — taking cues from the original crisp details and incised decorative elements, as well as incorporating processes like computer-controlled milling.'

Organised around six floors and including a rooftop penthouse, the townhouse features a series of sculptural stairs, generous floor openings and glazed double-height spaces 'to emphasise the grand proportions of the building and create visual and spatial connections between the floors', according to Chen.

On the ground floor, the entry vestibule is comprised of a generous foyer, cloakroom and powder room. A nearby travertine and bronze stairway leads to the main entertaining and family space of the home, a four-metre-high parlour, while a second travertine stairwell in the rear of the building links to the kitchen, a formal dining room, and a wine cellar and cinema in the basement. Modernist pieces from the US, Italy and Scandinavia are combined with contemporary custom-designed furniture and abstract paintings throughout, which add pops of colour to the decor.

Previous page: An unexpectedly spacious and airy parlour space with contemporary artwork by Robert Szot greets guests in this MKCA-renovated Neo-Grec beauty on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Image by Alan Tansey

'Because we approached the total design of the house from the broad strokes to details from the standpoint of a single, cohesive perspective, we were able to be more thoughtful about how the spaces are used and how they feel,' says Chen.

The master suite occupies the entire second floor and is anchored by a floor-to-ceiling fireplace in Montclair striato marble and inlaid bronze, and joined by a custom bed by MKCA, nightstands by Christopher Kurtz and Vladimir Kagan swivel chairs, among other striking pieces. Clad in imperial Danby marble and white Venetian plaster, the elegant and peaceful master bath is separated from the bedroom by a dressing room.

The third floor accommodates a suite in the front and two smaller bedrooms in the rear, and on the fourth floor, a cosy library with custom millwork shelving showcases a unique artwork by Sarah Oppenheimer comprised of a flush skylight, front-silvered mirror and blackened aluminium. A steel stairway entices visitors to the rooftop penthouse, fully glazed with a sliding enclosure that opens out to a roof terrace offering spectacular views of the New York City skyline.

Soft hues and matte architectural finishes afford the home a natural feel, while the sensitive yet innovative use of local materials provides tactility. In particular, silk, wood, linen and leather feature throughout. 'I love how there's a wide range of spaces of different scales that still feel somehow unified,' says Chen. Meticulous attention to materiality, the interplay of technology and artistry, and an appreciation for the local architectural history make this home stand out.

This page: In the grand entry vestibule, robotically milled egg-and-dart moulding and V-groove cuts create an intricately folded and pleated surface alongside a sconce by Hervé Van der Straeten. Image by Alan Tansey



On the fourth level, a bedroom and a study are linked by a pocket hotel door and unified by Gradient Aurora wall covering from Calico. The custom walnut and leather bed is by Vonnegut/Kraft, while the Elysia armchair is by Luca Nichetto. In the adjoining study, a walnut daybed by Vonnegut/Kraft is joined by a side table by KWH and laser-etched Corian cloisonné cabinets by Tietz-Baccon. Images by Alan Tansey