

The New York Times

Uptown, With a Downtown Vibe

On Location

By TIM McKEOUGH MARCH 27, 2018



Farzam Kamel and Jessica Wilpon Kamel at home with their children, Miles, left, and Henry. Ms. Kamel, a partner in the interior design firm Ronen Lev, added her own sense of style to the newly converted condo with furniture and custom touches.

Credit: Winnie Au for The New York Times

When Farzam Kamel and Jessica Wilpon Kamel were newlyweds living in the West Village of Manhattan, they undertook an exacting, yearlong gut renovation to transform their tired 700-square-foot one-bedroom condo into a pristine modern home that suited them completely.

They demolished walls, moved the kitchen and the bathroom, carved out space for a dressing room, and installed white oak floors, sleek custom millwork and a Bulthaup kitchen.

“It was amazing — [the apartment](#) was perfect,” said Ms. Kamel, 35, an interior designer. “And then we had Henry.”

What the apartment lacked, unfortunately, was space for children.

After the couple's son was born in 2012, "his crib was in our bedroom," said Mr. Kamel, 35, a partner at Sterling.VC, a venture capital fund of Sterling Equities that owns the professional video gaming team [New York Excelsior](#).

It took only a few months of being squeezed together for the couple to come to a realization: They would have to give up their beloved apartment in order to find a home with more space and multiple bedrooms.

Today, Ms. Kamel is a partner at [Ronen Lev](#), an interior design firm that regularly tackles top-to-bottom home renovations and runs a magazine-like website, which her friend Chelsea Clinton celebrated with [a launch party](#) last September.

However, in 2012, with parenting duties piled on top of busy work schedules (at the time, Mr. and Ms. Kamel were collaborating on a fashion e-commerce start-up called Edition01), they couldn't fathom diving into another major renovation project of their own.

"We didn't feel like we had time," Ms. Kamel said.

They did, however, have expert help in finding a new apartment. Ms. Kamel's father is Richard A. Wilpon, a senior partner at Sterling Equities, the real estate development company that also owns the New York Mets.

"He has an encyclopedic knowledge of New York real estate," Mr. Kamel said. So when Mr. Wilpon urged the young family to consider an apartment at Philip House, a 1920s building on the Upper East Side that Cheshire Group was converting to condos, they decided to humor him — although they initially had no intention of moving uptown.

"I was like, 'I'm not moving all the way up to 88th Street,'" Ms. Kamel said.

But when she saw the building's grand, raw spaces as construction was beginning, and visited a model apartment designed by [Victoria Hagan](#), she changed her mind.

"It was just bare bones, but I loved it," she said. "It had the kind of the flooring I would put in and the moldings I would do. It was not dissimilar to how I would renovate the space."

She and Mr. Kamel closed on a three-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bathroom unit of roughly 2,100 square feet in October 2013, for about \$4 million. Then they waited as construction on their new apartment dragged on — including the installation of custom bookshelves and cabinetry flanking the fireplace, and built-in speakers integrated within ceiling beams, which Ms. Kamel had designed and negotiated as part of the deal — before moving in a year later.

The wait gave Ms. Kamel time to concoct a furniture plan with enough of a young downtown feel to counter the building's uptown formality before the couple's second son, Miles, arrived in 2015.

The home now mixes furniture by some of her favorite European designers and American craftspeople. In the foyer, she paired a bench from the British company Pinch with a custom walnut

console by the Hudson Valley-based [Casey Dzierlenga](#). The dining area is anchored by a hefty table by the French designer Christian Liaigre and campaign-style chairs by the Long Island City-based designer [Richard Wrightman](#).

Some pieces took longer to find.

“Those coat hangers took a year,” Mr. Kamel said, pointing to metal Afteroom wall hooks from Menu in the foyer.

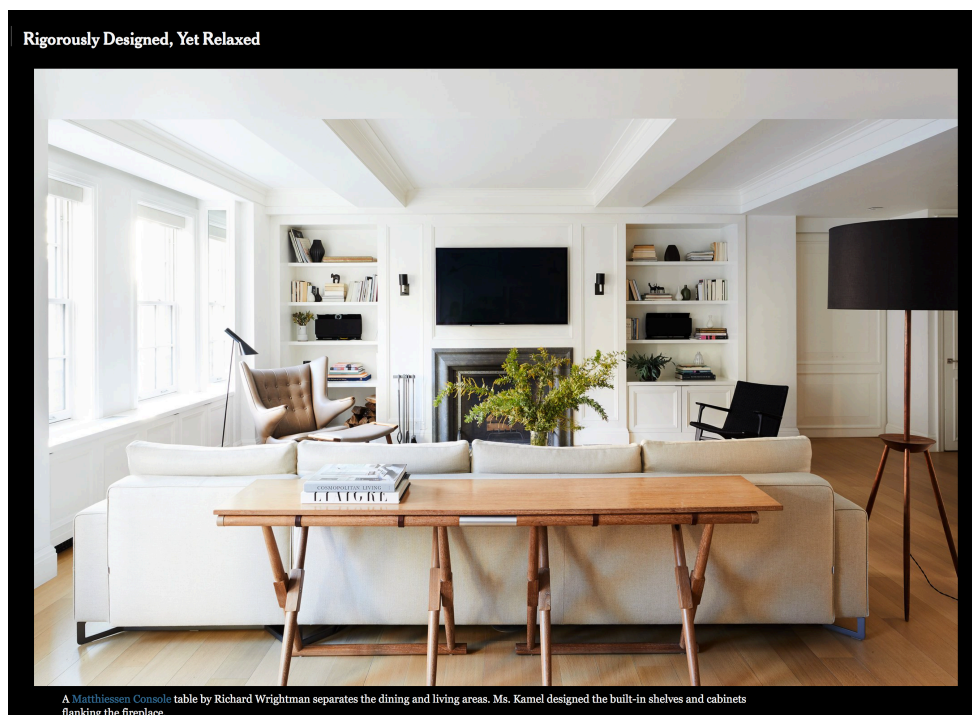
Ms. Kamel explained that she merely needed to consider every option before committing.

Then there was the living room rug. “I’m a proud Persian man; I need a Persian rug,” said Mr. Kamel, who was born in Iran. “But we wanted something that wasn’t very traditional Persian.”

After some sleuthing, they eventually found what seemed like an ideal compromise: an Iranian-made rug from [Orley Shabahang](#) with a modern-looking geometric pattern, which now occasionally serves as a sort of urban campground when Mr. Kamel builds improvised tents before the fireplace for the children.

The completed apartment, rigorously considered yet with a relaxed vibe, “feels very much like us,” Ms. Kamel said.

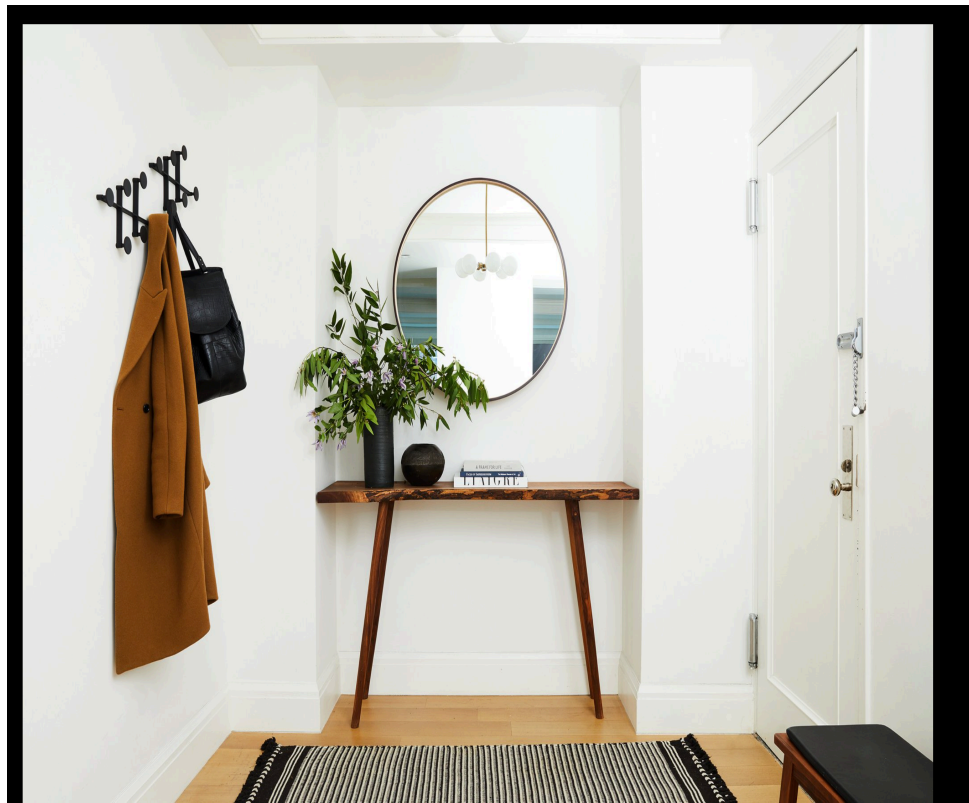
“And hopefully,” Mr. Kamel added, “it doesn’t feel like there’s an area where you’re not supposed to sit.”





Richard Wrightman chairs (about \$1,750 each) and Wildspirit chairs from Lepere (about \$590 each) surround a table by Christian Liaigre in the dining area. The photographs are by Massimo Vitali.

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The walnut console in the foyer was custom made by Casey Dzierlenga to fit perfectly in a nook. The wall-mounted Afteroom coat hangers are from Menu (about \$130).

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A CH25 chair, designed by Hans Wegner for Carl Hansen & Son in 1950, sits in the living room.

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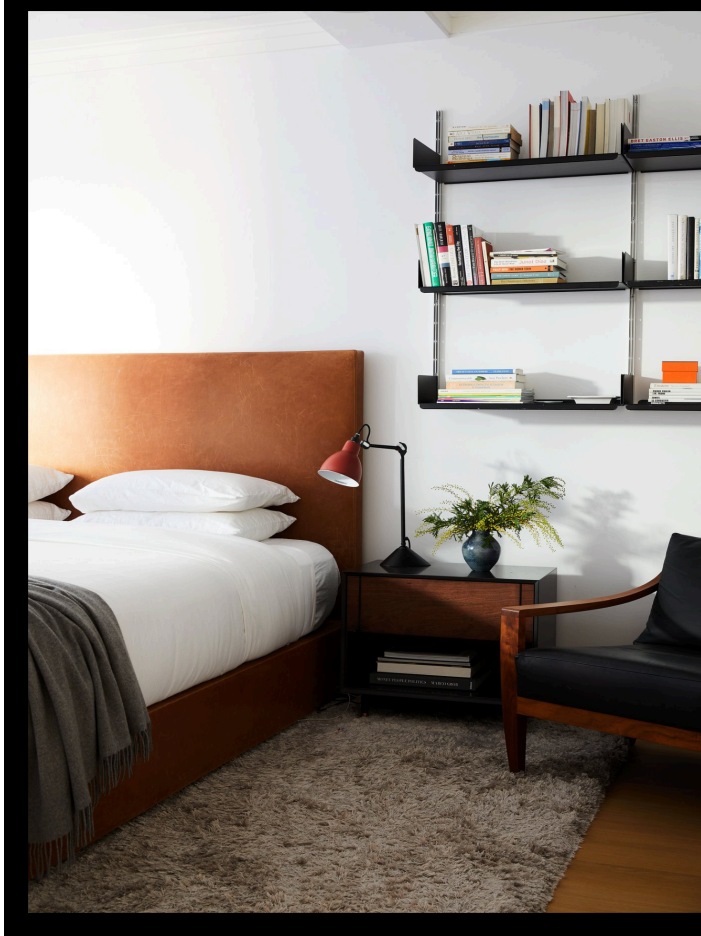
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The eat-in kitchen is furnished with Wishbone chairs by Hans Wegner (\$595 each), a Saarinen dining table from Knoll (from \$2,135) and a Bestlite BL9 pendant lamp from Gubi (about \$600).

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Ms. Kamel designed the custom leather bed in the master bedroom after being inspired by the Fasano hotel in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The shelving is from [Vitsoe](#).

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Giant [Dinosaur Rex bedding](#) from [Snurk](#) (\$119) tops one of the beds in the children's bedroom.

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The playroom is furnished with a Knoll [Womb chair](#) by Eero Saarinen (from \$4,074) and the [Vertical Mini Library](#) from Oeuf (\$678). The car is from Vilac (\$143).

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