

The New York Times

The Go-Getter's Guide to Better Nesting

By JULIE V. IOVINE



Antoine Bootz for The New York Times

A STEP UP Philip Galanes, left, and Michael Haverland fused two apartments with a spinal stair inspired by the furniture of Jean Prouvé.

IT'S one of the oldest stories in Manhattan. Philip Galanes and Michael Haverland had outgrown the one-bedroom studio they shared in a 1920's apartment building on University Place, but found themselves priced out of the market for something bigger. Their setback became an opportunity for invention when they decided to stay put and combine two apartments.

"We loved our building and like living on a wide, quiet street," said Mr. Galanes, an entertainment lawyer. "We didn't really want to move — we knew where to get our shirts done!"

Like blind dates, combined apartments rarely show off either party's best features. They inevitably lead to awkward arrangements of back-to-back rooms that seem redundant, while long halls trail off without logic. Mr. Galanes and Mr. Haverland attacked their problems with ingenuity, fusing

two distinct residences into a smooth synthesis of old and new that looks as if it should have always existed. Or as Mr. Galanes put it: "How many people have a town house on the 11th floor? And with a doorman."

They started out with a lot of nerve, and the prospect of some turnaround cash. They were able to sell their fifth-floor apartment for four times the \$160,000 Mr. Galanes had paid for it in 1991. To find out if anyone was thinking of moving out, they followed up a building-wide letter campaign by buttonholing neighbors in the elevator.

Once, Mr. Galanes even enlisted his mother to query "the nice old lady next door" about her retirement plans. "She wrote an extremely polite note back to us on blue stationery saying she was not interested at all," Mr. Galanes recalled. "We were one step away from putting stink bombs under people's doorways, trying to get rid of them."

Their scheming finally paid off,

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PREWAR LOOK Inventive on a Bowery budget, the owners turned \$45 glass-fronted legal bookcases into kitchen cabinets worthy of a Park Avenue pantry, below. Counters are office-supply white boards made of poured porcelain. They trimmed the edges in stainless steel for a touch of diner chic.



Photographs by Antoine Bootz for The New York Times

EASY MODERN Wood pieces from the 1940's and 50's warm the living room: Tapio Wirkkala side table from a Danish Web site (www.dmk.dk); Edward Wormley coffee table; fiberglass chair by Greta Grossman. Yngve Ekström chair in black lamb's wool. Below, a George Nelson bureau fits when stacked.



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though, and within just one month they had arranged to buy identical one-bedroom apartments on the 10th and 11th floors.

Mr. Haverland, an architect, set about gracefully connecting the apartments with what little money remained after the purchase. "Because we lived in the building, I was able to get the floor plans of every apartment," he said. "So at least I knew all the options."

Mr. Haverland treated the two apartments as if they were two floors in a compact town house, designing a staircase to run along the wall where the kitchens had once been. The 30-foot-wide space — with two rooms up, two down; plus a kitchen — is roomier than a typical town house.

He located the main bedroom and living room on the upper floor, with the front entrance. He turned the floor below into a spacious dining room with a corner study for Mr. Galanes, who is writing a novel. The second downstairs room became a television and guest room, with a Murphy bed.

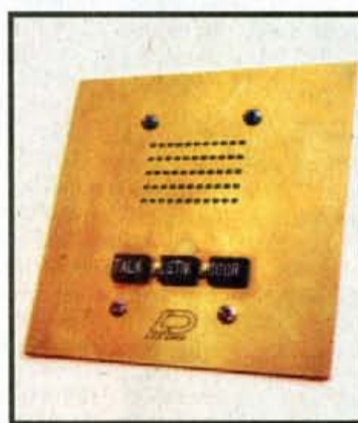
The staircase is the main event. Stylistically, it was inspired by Jean Prouvé, the early French Modernist known for a craftsmanlike industrial aesthetic. Mr. Haverland thought the look would blend well with the building's 1920's detailing. From a small balcony that overlooks the stairway as it plunges one story, the view of its slab-thick oak treads balanced on a muscular spine of black steel suggests something robustly organic, like a dinosaur skeleton.

Though stashed under the stairs, the tiny kitchen is hardly cramped. Only a bar counter separates it from the dining area, while the staircase's open treads admit some sunlight.

The kitchen sets the tone for the rest of the apartment: part industrial Modern, part decrepit prewar. Something daring and new in Grandma's day, but comfortably nostalgic today. Could there be such a thing as matronly chic?

"We really don't like the cool, crisp Modern of lofts," Mr. Haverland said, noting that most of the brand-name pieces in the apartment, like a George Nelson bureau and a Charlotte Perriand bookshelf, are examples of Modernism in its fledgling days, in the 30's and 40's, as opposed to the brassier 60's. "We're attracted to early Modern because it has a lot of wood," he added. "It's warmer and it's not such a tight aesthetic. You can be eclectic with it."

The kitchen cabinets had to look old-fashioned, too, like a butler's pantry. And glass-fronted legal bookcases, for \$45 each from a used office furniture shop in Brooklyn, fit the part. To install them, Mr. Ha-



COLOR FIELD A 15-foot 60's glass hanging by Michael Higgins, below right, visually connects the two floors.

PATINA New brass fixtures were "aged" with ammonia to match 20's originals, left.

FIFTIES FUN Below left, Saarinen pedestal chairs in Alexander Girard houndstooth print; George Nakashima table; ceiling light by Pierre Guariche.



verland removed their backs and made them deeper with blocks so that the biggest dinner plates would fit. Some clunky porcelain knobs picked up for \$7 on eBay added personality.

Nothing in the apartment was meant to be perfect. "We're perfectionists in our other lives," Mr. Galanes said. "When we come home, it's more comfortable to be surrounded by things that aren't so rigid."

Building imperfections in didn't cost extra, but it was painstaking work. The contractors and workmen that the couple could afford were inexperienced and could not even read construction drawings.

"So much of our money went into the purchase price that we really had to compromise on contractors," Mr. Haverland said.

He was thrown into the role of constant supervisor, or as he put it, "on-site collaborator." His office is right across the street, so he would drop by as often as every two hours to monitor progress. His presence allowed for some on-the-spot refinements. For instance, when the contractor was about to rip out some old French doors, Mr. Haverland had them saved and turned into cabinetry for the Murphy bed in the television-cum-guest-room. And when workers were about to toss out damaged molding from the living room ceiling, he had it recycled for the hall.

The wood floor was sanded by hand to make sure that all the stains and irregularities were preserved. "The last thing we wanted was a shiny new floor," he said.

Though small and inconspicuous, the brass switch plates received lavish attention. They, too, had to assume the look of a certain age. In fact, Mr. Galanes had liked the original ones from his old apartment so much that he added a clause to the sales contract allowing him to take them.

To match the originals, Mr. Haverland bought new brass fixtures and invented his own ammonia-bath process to give them a slightly moldering look. (He discovered by chance that his technique worked best in East Hampton, where the salt air hastened the corrosion.)

The project took a year to complete, and the couple moved in last March. Since then, they have become increasingly dependent on eBay to help them furnish their apartment with equal ingenuity.

"A few years ago, I was willing to walk around the entire weekend looking for furniture," Mr. Galanes said. "Now, I'm just too tired. eBay is perfect for the early middle-aged." Now, instead of getting up early on Sunday morning to get to the flea market, he logs on to the Internet.

"And that's why we had to have a town house with a doorman," Mr. Haverland chimed in. "We need someone who can coordinate all our eBay deliveries."