

INTERIOR DESIGN BY FAYE CONE
INTERVIEW BY CHRISTOPHER PETKANAS
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEFF McNAMARA

In this Manhattan apartment, twin Shabby Chic sofas flanking a travertine fireplace are intentionally big for the living room; Faye Cone believes overscaled furniture makes small rooms feel larger. A 19th-century Indian Jali window was turned into a coffee table that sits atop a custom hieroglyphic rug by Martin/Patrick/Evan. Bronze and Mongolian wool stools are from Bourgeois Bohème. Steelhead trout painting is by O. Wharton.

makeover lesson #1
DETAILS

CHRISTOPHER PETKANAS: Here we are in New York, in a 1980s condominium building on the Upper East Side, and yet I could swear I was downtown, in a SoHo loft.

FAYE CONE: Our apartment was a traditional floor-through duplex, but after a gut renovation it now feels like a loft. My husband, Steve, and I are downtown people who live uptown because we're runners and we want to be near Central Park. I'm a very lucky girl. This is as good as it gets.

The ziggurat staircase in the entrance hall is a knockout. That was the biggest change, replacing and relocating the staircase. It allowed us to create a foyer where none existed. The new staircase is based on one I saw in a Tuscan farmhouse—travertine, with a hefty bronze rail. I wanted to introduce a sculptural design element. I also added custom moldings and a cove ceiling for a little graciousness, a quality that's hard to achieve in a loftlike space.

I can practically see my reflection in the walls.

They were sanded and painted maybe twelve times, using a lacquerlike process. But like the cabinetry throughout the apartment, which was painted on site, I wanted the hall walls to have a warm, human dimension. If you look closely you can see the brushstrokes. It's not that plastic-fantastic look. The cat under the staircase is papier-mâché, which is my idea of the perfect pet. When you come home from the opera at midnight you don't have to feed it!



How important is comfort to you?

There's a reading light for every chair, and every chair is an invitation to sit down and get comfortable. You can put your feet up on everything. All the decisions I made were guided by practicality. If a house doesn't function, no one's going to be happy.

Those are some seriously squishy sofas.

They're indestructible and from Shabby Chic. I think of them as his-and-hers sofas for Steve and me, but they also work extremely well for cocktail parties, and people have slept on them. They're rather big for the space, but that's intentional—overscaled furniture makes small rooms feel more spacious. And by limiting the window coverings to electronically controlled shades, the terrace now reads as part of the interior.

Your way with built-in storage units is original and amusing.

I'm all about integrating antiques into built-ins. The one in the family room incorporates the door of an old painted cupboard, which makes it look like a hutch. It holds linen, china, silver, the TV, and a liquor cabinet. Space is so tight in New York you can't live without built-ins, but at the same time you don't want to feel like you're on a ship.

I can't help but notice the hardware. It's so glamorous.

To me, it's like jewelry for the home. We sprung for E.R. Butler, including crystal-and-polished chrome doorknobs, because we know we're not going anywhere—we're here to stay.

Your bedroom is all over the map, but in a good way: Nantucket, say, by way of ancient Greece.

An artist in upstate New York made the bed, using architectural salvage that was whitewashed. The night tables are classical capitals in cast plaster we already owned. We didn't have room for their glass tops, so we just got rid of them. Hanging curtains on a curved ceiling track was an easy way of resolving a problematic corner.

You're obviously very fond of folk art.

My prize piece is a turkey sign from 1900, or so, that hung outside a farm in Pennsylvania, but actually my collection is quite eclectic. There's everything from a real Keith Haring to a series of Nadar photographs everyone thinks are originals but that I actually cut out of a museum catalog. Art is where you find it. My feeling about art is, don't hesitate to move it around. I shift mine every three years. I also like humor. Normally, if you're

going to hang a fish over a fireplace you hang a taxidermied one. I hung a painting of a steelhead trout.

The way you compose furniture and objects is very skillful, yet you make it look so easy.

Honestly, it just sort of evolves. I don't fuss over it. In the living room I started with an antique Chinese grain chest and over time I added the Acoma pottery from Mexico, the Grecian urn, and the Chinese woven-bamboo undergarment. This little tableau is finished—until I decide to change it. I'm not married to it. It's not set in cement. Who wants to live that way?



OPPOSITE: This travertine staircase with a custom bronze rail replaced an old "space hog" staircase in the entrance hall. The wall is a custom color by Donald Kaufman, highly lacquered. THIS PAGE: A 1900 sign from a Pennsylvania turkey farm is part of Cone's folk art collection.



OPPOSITE: A multipurpose family room that serves as a TV/breakfast area is a natural extension of the kitchen. Wrought-iron Africa side chairs by Alexandra Diez; Aran Isles sofa in Aubergine mohair velvet by Ralph Lauren; French Script pillow fabric by Christopher Hyland; Gravada floor lamp by Roman Thomas. ABOVE: An antique painted French cupboard door was integrated into the family room's built-in storage unit. BELOW: A mirrored backsplash gives the illusion of expanse in the kitchen.



Of all the rooms in the apartment, I think it's the kitchen that most tricks you into thinking you're in a loft.

Absolutely. The kitchen opens up to the living room on one side and the family room, where we eat and watch TV, on the other. The idea was that it should be an extension of both these spaces. It's not a show kitchen, even if it's designed to stand up to scrutiny. It works. I use it.

It's all in the details for Faye Cone. Ten ideas we love:

1. Locate outlets in the baseboard, not higher up in the drywall. This requires a little more carpentry, but results in a more finished look.

2. Designate as many outlets as possible to be half switches and plug your table lamps into them. You'll feel like a lighting genius as you walk into the room, flip a single switch, and have perfect table lighting instantly.

3. Consolidate switches for a room in one location, even if it means having a six-, eight-, or ten-switch panel. The look is much neater and less obtrusive.

4. Position light switches 36 inches from the floor. It's a more natural reach for your hand and allows better space for artwork.

5. Install a narrow shelf with a drop-down front underneath a built-in desk top to hold a power strip and hide wires.

6. Line one or more drawers with felt and dividers for no-tarnish, easy access silverware and silver serving pieces.

7. Build rows of slotted vertical storage to safely house platters and oversize serving pieces.

8. Two sinks means two disposals. The extra cost is minimal and the convenience is great. Batch feeders recommended for safety.

9. Incorporate wastebasket "drawers" as part of your vanity.

10. Install electrical outlets inside medicine cabinets.



Cone is always adding and subtracting elements from this disciplined grouping in the living room. The one constant is the mid-19th-century Chinese grain chest in elm. Hanging above it, a c. 1800 Chinese woven undergarment. OPPOSITE: A close-up of the Acoma pots by Sandra Victorino.



THIS PAGE, AND OPPOSITE: In the master bedroom, curtains in Jack Lenor Larsen's Snowdrift and Stark's Rigaud rug in ivory wool/linen have similarly plush textures. Cone's bed is made of whitewashed architectural salvage—the footposts look like lighthouses. The Giacometti-style bedside lamp is from Niedermaier. Donald Kaufman's DKC-54 is on the walls. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES.