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Great Rooms: Inside Designer Tia Cibani's Chelsea Home

By Rumaan Alam



Photo: Annie Schlechter

When Tia Cibani found the Chelsea house she and her family now call home, she knew it would require more than a mere restoration—the building was in a state of disrepair, and far from the retreat she dreamed of. She was certain, though, that it had potential, and with Winka Dubbeldam, who heads the New York–based firm Archi-Tectonics, she began the two-year process of utterly transforming the crumbling building.

Central to this transformation was extending the house's footprint, raising the top floor about 12 inches, and rethinking the rear façade—all while negotiating the complexities of building in a city with rigorous landmark laws. “We wanted to have this fluid, very organic façade, which would allow a visual connection from the

lower to the higher levels, and also to what we call the other room—the garden,” says Dubbeldam.

Cibani, who [designs an eponymous line of clothing](#) and was, before that, the creative director of the brand [Ports 1961](#), describes the process of making the home as a collaboration. The architect concurs, noting, “I love working with people who have an idea. I just love the whole discussion, and the challenge. I always think if you get challenged, you do better things.” Cibani’s mandate for Dubbeldam was simple. “I told her I wanted more space, more light. I wanted a clean feeling, but I wanted it to not be clinical and cold,” she says. “I wanted it to be warm.”

Cibani, who designed the interiors herself, achieved that sense of warmth by incorporating soft textures and classic furniture, like the big sawhorse dining table and an invitingly sprawling living-room sofa. Cibani and her partner, William Langewiesche, welcomed daughter Castine about a year after moving in. The laid-back décor is sophisticated but not fussy: Toys strewn about on the floor don’t look out of place. The design was very much about entertaining, which they do often, throwing casual mingle-in-the-kitchen-style dinner parties. The open plan encourages guests to wander, and that contributes to the casual, welcoming air Cibani was after. “I like to think of houses or residential areas as connective zones,” says Dubbeldam. “This very fluid, connected interior isn’t about rooms, but more about zones. In theory, we think of it as one open area.” This is a modern way of thinking, quite different from what the structure’s original builders would have intended, but it creates a sense of comfort that guests can intuit, and it suits the family’s way of life. Cibani’s career in fashion means she’s always grappling with the rapid pace of the larger trend cycle; the house is, as all should be, an escape from professional pressures. “My work is always changing,” she says. “It’s nice that my home can be a constant. I wanted this to be lasting.”

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Photo: Annie Schlechter/Annie Schlechter

The home’s interiors are situated and decorated in a way that makes the most of the view of the garden beyond, which is accessible from the parlor floor via the oversize trapezoidal door. The table is by Jonathan Adler. “It seats 12 people comfortably, although there were times we squeezed in 14,” says Tia Cibani. The rustic French chairs were found at an antiques dealer in Hudson.



Photo: Annie Schlechter/Annie Schlechter

The kitchen cabinetry is by Valcucine. The bags are from India, and the baskets are from Tanzania. "I like things to feel accessible and not too precious in my collection, and in my home, too," says Cibani. "I hate if things are just sitting there not being appreciated—I like things to be used."



Photo: Annie Schlechter/Annie Schlechter

“We really designed the garden to be the other room,” says Dubbeldam, “with walls and lighting and different levels. We tried to make it another interior.”



Photo: Annie Schlechter/Annie Schlechter

In the master suite, the architect created a sizable terrace. The wood floors within the room run right out of doors, establishing a subtle sense of continuity. Thus, says Dubbeldam, “the balcony becomes part of the bedroom.” The coin chair is by Johnny Swing. The bed is from Design Within Reach.



Photo: Annie Schlechter/Annie Schlechter

Cibani was skeptical of giving so much space to the tub—square footage that could have been devoted to more closet storage—but is glad she relented; Castine often plays in the room while Cibani is getting ready in the morning. The tub is custom-made. The Heart Cone chair is from Vitra; the chandelier is vintage Venini.



Photo: Annie Schlechter/Annie Schlechter

The stairwell is defined by the angled glass wall, which runs from the parlor floor to the top of the building. Natural light floods into the space from a skylight overhead. The gold wallpaper is by Flat Vernacular; Cibani is friends with the label's design team, and collaborated with them on the sets for a recent runway presentation.



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