

Neutral

Party

For a pair of high-octane clients, designer Michelle R. Smith fashions a Manhattan oasis that's as luxurious as it is cool.

By Max Berlinger Photographs by William Jess Laird Styled by Bebe Howorth

In the living room of Simon Huck and Phil Riportella's West Village duplex apartment, which was designed by Michelle R. Smith, the mohair sofa is by Bellini and the chrome and mirrored glass cocktail table is by John Mascheroni. Stool by Andrianna Shamaris; custom rug by Patterson Flynn. For details, see Resources.

D

uring that strange and surreal pandemic spring of 2020, Simon Huck and Phil Riportella needed to move. The reason will be familiar to many couples who suddenly found themselves working at home during that time: Zoom. “We moved because of his Zoom voice,” says Huck, a quippy public relations and marketing guru who famously works with the Kardashians and is

a familiar presence on their TV show and social media feeds.

From across the room, Riportella, cofounder of the fragrance and candle line Snif, issues a protest and then laughs. “I am loud,” he admits. The gregarious couple met seven years ago on Tinder and were married last November at the Hotel Bel-Air in Los Angeles in front of a guest list filled with names like Chrissy Teigen, Hailey Bieber, and Kim and Kourtney. But on a recent summer’s day they were at home in New York, showing off their renovation.

When they started their hunt for a new place, Riportella scoured Zillow, leaving no stone unturned. SoHo, TriBeCa, the Upper East Side, Chelsea—you name the Manhattan neighborhood, they looked. For Huck, having room to spread out (and rooms with doors) was key. When Riportella finally found the solution, it was where they least expected it: right in their own backyard, in the same Greenwich Village building where they already lived.

The ground-floor duplex had everything they were looking for—an ample 2,500 square feet, three bedrooms, and a wraparound terrace. The prewar building had all its charm intact but had received a thorough refresh a decade earlier by COOKFOX Architects and won awards for its sustainable design. The apartment delivered the best of both worlds: the private and spacious feel of a townhouse with the amenities of a luxury apartment building (gym, pool, doorman).

It was not a surprise, then, that designer Michelle R. Smith was brought in to turn the house into a home. The ELLE DECOR A-List talent worked on the couple’s last apartment, their two homes in Montauk on New York’s Long Island, Huck’s office, and his brother’s house in Toronto. “Michelle’s our boss—we work for her,” Huck jokes. “And she came in and said, ‘I see what we’re going to do.’”

Smith’s vision was to transform the West Village duplex with touches that are minimal but warm, streamlined yet sensual. While she retained the existing floor plan, Smith suggested practical and stylish tweaks throughout. For example, she leaned heavily on blond oak wood as a means of creating visual cohesion, using it not just for flooring but for millwork ranging from the office’s open shelving to the den’s wall of hidden storage where it conceals a TV. Meanwhile, a new walk-in closet recalls a Madison Avenue boutique in miniature. “I wanted this house to feel like an exquisitely tailored Loro Piana coat,” she says. “We used all these cashmere colors, like cream and white, along with the oak.”

Furniture adds a layer of texture to play off the surfeit of wood. In the living room, a sofa in plump oatmeal mohair is paired with a mirrored cocktail table. A green velvet settee and marble plinth side table in a corner of the dining room is where Huck takes his morning coffee.

While neutral tones largely dominate, there are moments of drama to befit a pair of *Real Housewives* devotees. Take the Yves Klein–blue rug that runs up the stairs and anchors both Huck’s office and the primary bedroom. Huck had seen a runner in that color at a friend’s house and suggested it to Smith, who then (pun intended) ran with it. Art adds yet another dimension and was handpicked by the couple with an eye to works that are colorful and abstract.

The kitchen, too, is a showstopper, with bold black-and-white-veined marble used not only on the countertops but also for the open shelves, which serve as the room’s focal point. Subway tiles creep up the walls and onto the ceiling, while a vintage stove is another showpiece. All this for a couple who admit they rarely—okay, fine, *never!*—cook.

Huck and Riportella love to entertain, and their wrap-around terrace creates the perfect setting. At their parties, the brass table in the adjoining dining room overflows with catered delights. That relaxed attitude “is a Michelle thing, which I love,” Huck says. “Put your glass down, spill on it, stain it, let it be lived in. The more wear and tear, the better.” ■



Simon Huck (left) and Phil Riportella in their living room. The artwork is by Paul B.



In the dining room, a Brian Thoreen table is surrounded by Giancarlo Valle chairs. Vintage Swedish chandelier from Galerie André Hayat; custom rug by Patterson Flynn; artworks by Ammon Rost (left) and Michael Angel.



"I wanted this house to feel like an exquisitely tailored Loro Piana coat."
—Michelle R. Smith



Huck prefers to sit on a custom daybed with a wide-wale white corduroy cushion while working in his home office. Vintage glass side table; custom millwork by the Hoti Group; painting by Jonathan Todryk.

OPPOSITE: In the kitchen, Calacatta marble was used for everything from the shelving to the sink and floor. Vintage stool re-covered in wide-wale corduroy; ceiling light by Lumfardo.

BELOW: A bright blue custom Patterson Flynn wool rug edged in leather grounds the primary bedroom in color. Bed by Cassina; bedding by Garnet Hill; vintage Holophane sconces.

OPPOSITE, TOP: In the stairwell, the artwork is by Joe Henry Baker. Pendant by Coil & Drift; sheer Roman shades in a Rogers & Goffigon fabric.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: The dressing room's green plywood chair is by M.A.H. Custom millwork and sconces by Studio MRS.

