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NATURAL

of  
art

AN URBAN REFUGE THAT PLACES ORGANIC MATERIALS  
AND FINE CRAFTSMANSHIP FRONT AND CENTER

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A PAIR OF THREE-CENTURY-OLD metal-studded wood doors, left and opposite, from northern India now connect the library in this Manhattan loft to the master suite, this page. On the brick wall hangs a wooden ship's vent; its shape echoes circular brass hardware on 19th-century Chinese lacquered cabinets (one shown) flanking the walnut sleigh bed.



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SA COFOUNDER AND PARTNER OF A GLOBAL management-consulting firm, Niko Canner travels the world and works exhausting hours. So when he bought a loft in a mid-19th-century manufacturing building in Manhattan's West Chelsea neighborhood, he dreamed of transforming the 3,600-square-foot open space into "a place for quiet contemplation, but where many people could convene without a lot of bother or fuss."

Canner asked New York City-based interiors pro and art curator Amy Lau to help him achieve those potentially contradictory goals. Questioning him in detail about his tastes and lifestyle, Lau learned first that "Niko wanted a specific area where he could have tea each morning in a Japanese-inspired setting," she recalls, "which told me that space, simplicity, and order were important." Next, he said he was drawn to furni-

ture by George Nakashima, the mid-20th-century Japanese-American woodworker whose pieces are admired for their natural edges, hewn to preserve the contours of the trees from which they were made. "This showed clearly that the owner valued craftsmanship, quality, and organic materials," says Lau. Finally, Canner expressed an interest in work by British environmental sculptor Andy Goldsworthy, known for his dramatic manipulations of nature. So, Lau continues, "I knew my client would be interested in unique installations reflecting the fluidity of the seasons."

The designer concluded that Canner wanted a home exuding a serene sense of ritual, with "an East-meets-West aesthetic." Working with locally based architect Ate Ate, she arrived at a plan that would add natural materials and simple finishes in neutral colors drawn

the owner wanted a place for quiet contemplation that could also accommodate large gatherings

AN 8½-BY-3½-FOOT walnut table by Tyler Hays dominates the dining room. Its natural edges echo the asymmetrical top of the vintage wall-mounted walnut china cabinet, opposite, built by George Nakashima, which now displays bronze Ted Muehling candlesticks. Japanese-style shoji screens by New York City-based craftsman Hisao Hanafusa can open to the library beyond when large groups visit.

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**MINIMALIST IN ITS** contours and furnishings, yet relaxed thanks to soothing colors and comfortable seating, the living room features a fireplace, above, with a 5-foot, natural edge-style mantel of American walnut designed by Tyler Hays of BDDW, also the source of the walnut Mills club chair with navy blue linen cushions. Against the brick wall, left, is a contemporary version of a traditional scholar's table, custom made in China from huanghuali, a prized rosewood.

## IN THE KNOW **GEORGE NAKASHIMA**

Natural edge furniture lends a graceful—for some, even spiritually fulfilling—touch to home decor.

The pioneering Japanese-American woodworker George Nakashima (1905–1990) used longitudinal cuts from tree trunks (flitches) to build his furniture, and let its edges follow the contours of the wood from which it came. “A tree is perhaps our most intimate contact with nature,” explained the master, who said he worked with logs the way a jeweler did with diamonds: “Each tree, each part of each tree, has its own particular destiny, its own special yearning to be fulfilled.”

Nakashima was influenced by an array of sources,

from traditional Asian furniture to the rustic work of early American settlers. In turn, he influenced a new generation of American artisans. For some examples, visit [finefurnituremaker.com](http://finefurnituremaker.com) and [dumonds.com](http://dumonds.com). The George Nakashima Woodworker studio ([nakashimawoodworker.com](http://nakashimawoodworker.com)), run by his daughter Mira, still creates new work and reproductions of its founder's designs at the original headquarters in New Hope, Pennsylvania. All pieces are made to order, so pricing varies according to size, complexity, and wood species.



**AN 18TH-CENTURY**

Chinese cedar Buddha presides over the tearoom, opposite, which centers on a 4-foot-square, 16-inch-high walnut Parsons table and stools. Above hang two abstract paper lanterns by German designer Ingo Mauer. The home office, right, outside the media room, has a built-in desk and cabinetry of continuous-grain walnut.

from the earth and the sky—complemented by exotic red accents in some of the textiles and lacquered pieces (as well as by the home’s original exposed-brick walls). The aim was to create a series of free-flowing, elegantly interconnected spaces where Lau’s client would be equally comfortable relaxing on his own or entertaining large groups of visitors.

With master and guest suites already defined by existing walls, the design team proceeded to divide up a wide-open area. Drywall was positioned to demarcate a media room and a home office. Two partitions of sliding custom Japanese-style shoji screens, comprising silk and pandanus-cloth panels instead of the traditional rice-paper ones, created a dining space and also completed the enclosure of an adjacent library outside the master bedroom. A freestanding, 8-foot-tall room divider made of dark-stained walnut spindles separated the entry foyer from a tea area equipped with a low table and stools for traditional seating.

That furniture grouping—along with the room divider, a dining table and chairs, a new living room fireplace mantel, and other key elements—were all custom designed by Tyler Hays of BDDW, a furniture company in Manhattan that specializes in clean-lined, finely crafted objects. The new pieces were expressly created to complement a vintage Nakashima dining room cabinet, which Canner bought at auction. Lau employed her curatorial skills to integrate other classic American, Asian, and European objects into the harmonious mix she assembled for the loft.



The result, she says, is a perfect expression of Niko Canner’s “aesthetic, understanding, and vision.” He likes the newly styled dwelling, too. “It pulls together a disparate set of traditions into something that is at once striking and welcoming, creative and unique,” Canner says. “It’s deeply comfortable to be solitary here. Yet, when Amy and I threw a party to thank about a hundred people who had worked on the project, there were so many smaller areas within the larger space that it felt like an intimate gathering.” ■

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