





## URBAN PRESERVATION

Sharkey-Gleicher Brownstone  
New York, New York

EARLY IN THE PROCESS WE DECIDED THAT ALMOST EVERY ASPECT OF THE RENOVATION WAS GOING TO BE GREEN—FROM THE GUT JOB TO THE DESIGN. WE WANTED A HEALTHY HOUSE MADE WITH CHEMICAL-FREE, NATURAL MATERIALS THAT DIDN'T PILLAGE THE EARTH.

— Lisa Sharkey





*Preceding pages, left:* Flowering mountain-grown sedum covers the roof. In the sunroom, the small tables are made from bamboo. The room's yellow and orange color theme was chosen to reflect the setting sun.

*Preceding pages, right:* The large windows let in maximum light and are insulated against city noise.

My husband, Paul, and I have long had a love affair with Manhattan's idyllic Upper West Side. We think the family-friendly neighborhood, with its scenic blocks of charming nineteenth-century brownstones and its easy access to parks and schools, is the perfect place to raise our children, Greg, Doug, and Casey. But finding the town house of our

wanted a healthy house made with chemical-free, natural materials. First on the agenda was disposing of hazardous waste properly to avoid contaminating any landfills, so we called in an environmental engineer who helped us remove the asbestos and the leaky oil tanks in the cellar. Next, we saved what we could from the old house, and even items we couldn't use, like warped and cracked wood joists, which we donated to a salvage flooring company. To provide cleaner, more dust-free air quality than forced air, we went with an ultra-efficient boiler and slim-profile radiators.

Aesthetically, we longed for a gorgeous and sophisticated house with rich textures, beautiful shapes, and glorious color that would work for our lively family. Our only worry was whether we could find eco fabrics and furniture that would reflect our style; we had boldly committed to going completely green before we knew for sure what we would find in the design world.

It was, in fact, a much bigger challenge than we anticipated to find suppliers and products that met our green and design standards. For example, we thought it would be simple to find kitchen cabinets that didn't contain formaldehyde and were made from wood certified as being from a sustainable forest. We were able to source them, but we were unable to "find" them locally. So we had to make a concession to our original goal of only buying within a 500-mile radius—and ordered the clean-lined pearwood-veneer cabinets from a supplier in Oregon. We did, however, find one of our favorite eco products, IceStone, just over the bridge in Brooklyn. Our IceStone countertops are just as strong as granite but made from concrete and recycled glass. We selected a luminescent color that features glistening green glass



*Above:* The open transoms on the parlor floor provide monumental scale and relate to the door beyond, as well as hearken back to the living room windows. Their design helps to widen the brownstone, which is only seventeen feet across. Their thickness gives an intentional appearance of strength and stability. The chest of drawers is by Environment Furniture and is constructed from reclaimed Peroba wood.

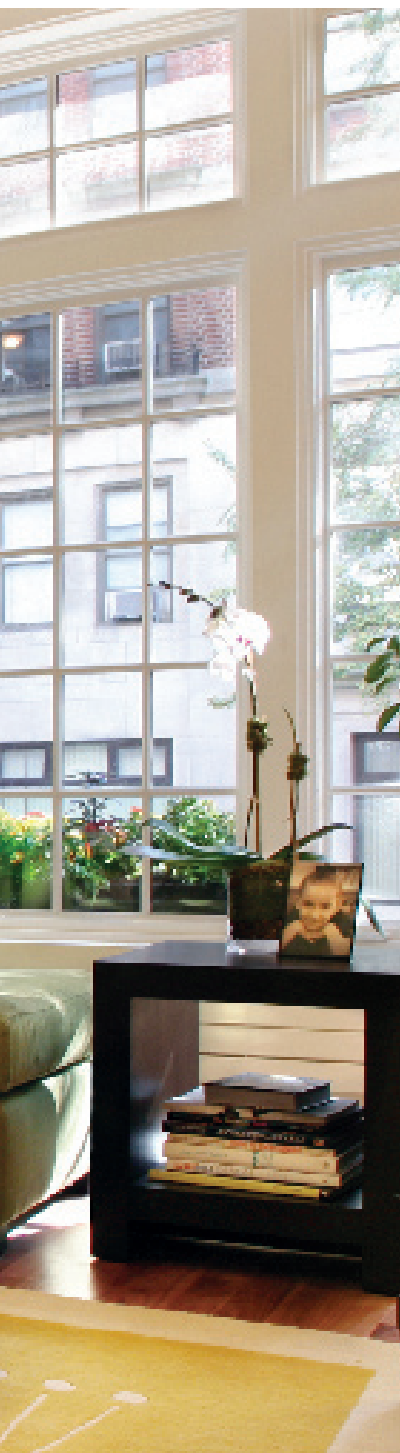
*Opposite:* The living room chairs from Donghia were recovered with postindustrial recycled fabrics by Angela Adams. The console and mirror are made by Environment Furniture from reclaimed wood.

dreams in our beloved neighborhood was challenging. When we started looking five years ago, we knew we needed to find a wreck because that was the only way we could afford a house in our price range, but, boy, did we get one. The four-story c. 1885 home that we purchased had been converted to rental apartments and stripped of all its original character. Thankfully, having an architect in the family has its benefits, and Paul could see beyond the flaws. Knowing he could completely transform the space, we happily prepared ourselves to tackle a major renovation.

Early in the process we decided that almost every aspect of the renovation was going to be green—from the gut job to the design. We







*Left:* The Liza Phillips rug carries the RugMark label, which certifies that no child labor was used in its production; and the couch, by Desiron, is manufactured without formaldehyde.

*Below:* The large living room windows flood the space beyond the room with light.



chips embedded in a polished gray concrete background and paired it with a dazzling mosaic of moss green, blue, and white recycled glass tiles for the backsplash.

We used the leftover IceStone we had for our fireplace surround, as well as for our bathroom counters.

In the spirit of family togetherness, we chose to nix a formal dining room in lieu of having our rectangular dining table and chairs (made from sustainably harvested wood) on one side of the kitchen, with a more casual eat-in semicircular banquette on the other. The kitchen is the center of our household—it's where the kids do homework and hang out with friends, and more often than not, we somehow all make it to the table for dinner, so it made sense to have as many places to lounge, eat, study, and connect as possible. But all that seating, plus the three tall stools that saddle up to the island, required upholstery, which led us to our first round of eco fabric samples. Unfortunately, they all looked and felt like variations on burlap—blah, stiff, and scratchy. Not knowing where else to turn, we hit the trade shows and were lucky to find Angela Adams, a textile designer who specializes in mod, graphic patterns in luscious colors. Angela let us see the very first sample



The recycled fabrics on the banquette show little dirt and are easy to clean. The glass table is a family heirloom.



The photos above the dining room table show New York's Central Park in autumn and summer and are by local photographers Ben Packer and Joan Lieber. The dining room table, by Desiron, was selected for its strong rectangular shape and its ability to accommodate large parties for dinner. Desiron's tables are manufactured just across the Hudson River in New Jersey, only a few miles from the brownstone. The bench is intentionally narrow to allow room between two separate eating areas (the dining room table and the kitchen island) in the space.







*Above:* In the daughter's floral-themed room, the InterfaceFLOR rug is laid down tile-by-tile with sticky corners, to avoid any toxins that can be contained in rug pads or wall-to-wall carpets.

*Opposite, above:* Homeowner and architect Paul Gleicher designed the master bedroom furniture. It was manufactured by Furniture, a Boston-based company that uses clean, organic, nontoxic materials in its manufacturing process. Lisa's sister Pamela designed and sewed the pillows from recycled fabrics.

*Opposite, below left:* The guest bathroom is covered in recycled glass tiles from Oceanside Glass Tile that have an iridescent shimmer.

*Opposite, below right:* The blue and white Denim Sky IceStone was used on all horizontal surfaces of the master bathroom, including the shower floor. The tub, by Bain Ultra, has a chromatherapy feature, which shines different colored lights into the bath.







of her new green line made from 100 percent recycled fabric. We loved what we saw and ordered a green and pink fabric for our dining chairs and a green trellis pattern for the counter stools. They add a bit of kick to the room we live in most and, because they're made of recycled postindustrial polyester, they are incredibly durable—perfect for chairs that are used 24/7.

Our living room is on the same floor as the kitchen, and the two spaces are connected by an airy stairwell landing that greets visitors as they make their way upstairs from the street-level entry. Defined by a dramatic wall of casement windows that are filled with argon to increase their thermal properties, the light-filled living room captures the very views that drew us to this neighborhood. To take in those views and provide a space for hanging out, we chose a roomy wraparound sectional sofa made without formaldehyde or endangered woods. To give a sense of springtime, we picked fabrics and accessories in soft greens and golden yellows against barely-there soft celery walls. For our floors, we hoped to find a sustainable option other than bamboo, which we worried wasn't durable enough to withstand the hard knocks of two teenage boys, plus our eight-year-old daughter and her friends, and our new puppy, not to mention my high heels. We were thrilled to find Lyptus, a fast-growing renewable hybrid of the eucalyptus tree that is very strong and boasts a rich hue and a striking grain.

Upstairs is Casey's feminine and colorful room; the first thing you notice when you peek inside is her brightly hued FLOR carpet tiles featuring a graphic pattern of yellow, orange, and pink daisies. Her room boasts a wall of casement windows that mimic the ones in the living room. The elegant glass chandelier was

a piece we brought from our old house—it felt too traditional for our living room, but it works perfectly in Casey's sweet room.

The palette in our bedroom, just down the hall, was influenced by the name of the IceStone color we used for our master bathroom—Denim Sky. It inspired me to cover the headboard and the bench at the foot of the bed in soft, durable, organic denim. To keep the space soothing, we went with a palette of dusty blues and creams punctuated by bold fuchsia and denim pillows made of recycled fabrics, hand-sewn by my sister Pamelah. Paul designed all the furniture in our bedroom, and a green furniture manufacturer made the pieces with chemical-free infill and sustainable woods.

Upstairs are the boys' rooms, painted in soft blue and green shades that, like all the paints in the house, contain no volatile organic compounds. Greg and Doug chose their own striped washable FLOR carpet tiles, made from partially recycled materials. For their beds, we found chemical-free mattresses and ultra-soft sheets made of bamboo and beech fibers.

The true gem of the house is the top floor, where you'll find a glass-enclosed room surrounded by a green roof. We were bold with color, choosing a plush orange sofa, which mimics the color of the sunset, and sofas and chairs that are perfect for stargazing. Casey, our youngest, loves to sit up there just as day turns into night and recite "Star Light, Star Bright" when she sees the first star. Our green roof has the added benefit of keeping our house cool and increasing the roof's longevity. It's been said that if everyone in New York had a green roof, the average temperature would drop by as much as five degrees. There are two different types of





The pearwood-veneer cabinets in the kitchen open upward rather than out in order to keep the lines clean in the wide open space. The IceStone countertops are as hard as granite and can withstand both very hot and very cold elements. The glass chips inside sparkle like sea glass and complement the recycled-glass tile backsplash.





green roofs you can choose, and we went with the extensive version, which requires less maintenance and only calls for one inch of soil beneath the plantings. The only downside is that you can't walk on it, so we inserted IceStone pavers that allow you to step between the sedum and not crush the delicate plants. We still find plenty of ways to enjoy our little patch of green, which came with seedlings, flowers, and even crickets. Casey and her friends love to catch crickets and take them to school to feed the frogs, much to the delight of her science teacher, and the sound of crickets chirping outside almost makes us forget that we're in the middle of a bustling city.

This experience has been an incredible adventure for our whole family. Paul was able to educate himself about an entirely new way of building that he can feel good about, and

he's gone on to get his LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) accreditation. I love that we've been able to create a beautiful space for our family and that I don't have to worry about the health hazards of anything in our home. As parents, we are so happy that our kids are really seeing firsthand what it means to care about the earth.

People say one person can't make a difference but we really disagree. One person makes a huge impact, and one family even greater impact. Many people are surprised to learn our house is green, and that's exactly the compliment that we hoped for. We want our house to prove that being green doesn't mean you have to sacrifice style. You can create a beautiful home that takes little from the earth and gives back to you in countless ways.

*Above left:* The copper pot beneath the powder-room sink was hand-tooled by Lisa Sharkey's great-grandfather at the turn of the twentieth century. The artwork is by Yuri Gorbachev, cousin of former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev. The vanity is a Lefroy Brooks Double Iroko Hardwood table. The bathroom fixtures are designed to store water and prevent scalding.

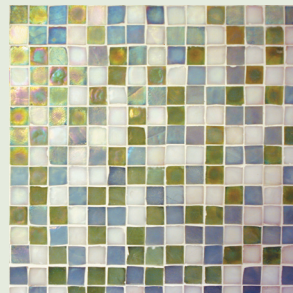
*Above right:* The eco fireplace is specifically designed for a maximum amount of heat to stay inside the living room. The extremely shallow depth of the fireplace forced the heat into the room and minimizes the amount that can escape into the chimney.

## GREEN FEATURES

Below left: IceStone is made of recycled glass and concrete; it's seen here in Sage Pearl. The factory is in Brooklyn, just a subway ride from the Green Brownstone.

Below right: Oceanside Glass Tile is also made of recycled glass. The company uses more than six hundred tons of recycled glass bottles every year in their manufacturing process.

Bottom: Imagine Tiles are made in a process that uses recycled water.



### 1. WHOLE HOUSE WATER FILTRATION SYSTEM

All the water that enters our house is filtered via an EcoWater filtration system located in the cellar. The system removes at least 95 percent of the impurities in the water and softens it as well.

### 2. HIGH-EFFICIENCY BOILER

Our ultra-efficient boiler burns 98 percent of the gas (only 2 percent wasted), saving energy and fuel costs.

### 3. RADIATORS

Rather than rely on forced air, which produces dust, mold spores, and other allergens, we chose to install radiators throughout. Myson radiators come in a sleek modern design and have a slim profile.

### 4. GREEN ROOF

Our green roof helps to keep the house cool in the summer, which reduces energy costs. It also increases the longevity of the roof below and absorbs 80 percent of the rainfall that otherwise ends up in the city sewage system.

### 5. CLAY WALLS

Clay walls in the stairwells and on the ground floor are natural and nontoxic. They "breathe," pulling in the humidity and keeping the house cool.

### 6. LYPTUS FLOORS

A hybrid of two eucalyptus trees, Lyptus is grown in managed forests in Brazil and matures in fourteen to sixteen years, compared to eighty years for many hardwoods. It has a strength and density similar to maple.

### 7. ICESTONE

IceStone is available in twenty-seven colors. It is heat resistant, as strong as granite, and free of VOCs (volatile organic compounds).

### 8. GLASS TILE BACKSPLASH

Made from recycled glass bottles and silica sand, these square tiles are beautiful, durable, and waterproof.

### 9. RECYCLED FABRICS

Angela Adams's colorful patterned fabrics in the kitchen and living room were made from 100 percent postindustrial recycled fabrics.

### 10. SUSTAINABLE FURNITURE

All of the new furniture in the house was produced without formaldehyde, chemicals, dyes, polymers, or toxins. Some pieces use reclaimed wood, while others use wood that is sustainably harvested.