

# INTERIOR DESIGN<sup>®</sup>

SEPTEMBER  
2007

We ♥ New York





## A Touch of Tokyo

MOST CITY TYPES DON'T BAT AN EYELASH when offered spicy Brazilian-style nigiri rolls or Beethoven set to house music. A home, on the other hand, is thought to be an escape from dissonance. It's a rare urbanite who actually wishes to live amid disparate looks, day after day. But **OIO Studio's** clients Rick Abeyta and Helena Fogarty are far from average.

Having earned a bachelor's

degree in Japanese culture and language before working in finance, Abeyta believes that "Japanese" design seen in the U.S. isn't a fair reflection of what's on the other side of the Pacific. "It's too austere and sterile," he explains, evoking the warmth that pervades Japanese lodges and yakitori spots, with their steel and sturdy woods. At the same time, he's fond of the bigness and rawness of lofts in Brooklyn. And he suggested superimposing the two aesthetics in the →

*From top: It took three days to assemble the raw-teak slats and other components of the custom hot tub on the terrace atop this Lower East Side duplex penthouse. A lantern at a nearby Korean restaurant inspired the custom walnut one in the stairwell.*







*Clockwise from top left: Walls in the dining area are surfaced in concrete mixed with latex paint. In the living area, the fireplace is hidden by sliding doors of laminated safety glass framed by cold-rolled steel tubes. Flooring in most of the apartment is American black walnut finished with clear polyurethane.*

Lower East Side duplex penthouse he was sharing with Fogarty before they separated.

"Rick was gutsy and willing to take a leap of faith. It was a chance for us to challenge our creativity," recalls Amy Lopez-Cepero, who's an architect at Specht Harpman in addition to running OLO Studio with Ramon Ocampo, who previously worked at 1100: Architect. Both partners were also friends with their clients as a couple.

Lopez-Cepero and Ocampo had already designed their share of conventional lofts. For this unusual one, the architects scoured art books and trolled the Internet, trying to get inside Abeyta's head. Which elements would allow American industrial and Japanese country to blend seamlessly? Quite a lot, it turns out.

For starters, there's a robustness about both styles, a generosity. They're built with components that are thick and wide. Moreover, Lopez-Cepero says,

"Function comes first, but the beauty is in the details."

That's definitely the feeling you get, sitting down at the table in the eat-in kitchen. Reminiscent of a booth in a sake bar, the table and benches were constructed from 125-year-old Douglas fir salvaged from the demolition of a Jersey City rope factory. Look closely, and you'll find holes where the nails once were. It's uncanny how this piece of local history seems right at home with the shoji-like shade of the kitchen window.

Overall, the kitchen captures the conviviality of Tokyo's *robata-yaki* "world barbecue" places, where raw meat is tossed onto an outrageously elongated grill and served to hungry, rowdy customers at the bar. Lopez-Cepero and Ocampo lacquered the plywood cabinets in a sunset orange that wasn't easy to pin down—the team mulled over no fewer than seven iterations before finding one that's neither →





*Above: Tatami mats cover both the floor and a niche in the master bedroom.*





too bright nor too muddy. Around the corner, the bar counter was constructed using traditional Japanese joinery techniques to piece the walnut together, rather like a puzzle, without nails.

There's a simplicity in both American urban and Japanese rural settings, but there's also gorgeous craftsmanship that can catch you by surprise. This 2,600-square-foot apartment, too, is touched by beauty in unexpected places. The stairwell's paneling of recycled bamboo imparts continuity and complements blackened-steel railings made by metalworkers from an unlikely source, a garment-rack manufacturer. In the bedroom, the two tatami mats lying at the foot of the bed are echoed by a pair of identical mats installed, tapestry-style, in the niche that stands in for a headboard.

The master bathroom has a Western-style walk-in shower with a separate whirlpool. Meanwhile, the roof terrace features a huge, round teak soaking tub and an equally mammoth rear-

projection television screen. Think of it as Japanese *onsen* meets American bachelor pad.  
—Amy Young

CUSTOM TUB (TERRACE): **ROBERTS HOT TUBS**. LANTERNS (TERRACE), CUSTOM PENDANT FIXTURES (KITCHEN): **THROUGH PEARL RIVER**. CUSTOM PENDANT FIXTURE (STAIRWELL): **MONDO DESIGN**. PENDANT FIXTURE (DINING AREA): **HOLLY HUNT**. RUG: **THROUGH ABC CARPET & HOME**. STOOL (LIVING AREA): **VITRA**. CEILING FIXTURES: **LIGHTOLOGY**. PILLOWS: **NEST INTERIORS**. RUGS (LIVING AREA), BEDDING (BEDROOM), WASTE BASKET (POWDER ROOM): **CRATE AND BARREL**. CUSTOM LAMPS (BEDROOM): **THROUGH LIGHTING BY GREGORY**. FAN: **HUNTER FAN COMPANY**. TATAMIS: **TATAMI ROOM**. REFRIGERATOR (KITCHEN): **GENERAL ELECTRIC COMPANY**. RANGE: **THERMADOR**. HOOD: **FABER**. SINK FITTINGS: **THG**. COUNTER MATERIAL: **MELD USA**. BACKSPLASH TILE: **ANN SACKS**. PANEL MATERIAL (STAIRWELL), DOOR MATERIAL (POWDER ROOM): **COR PRODUCTS**. FLOOR, COLUMN TILE (BAR): **STONE SOURCE**. TILE (POWDER ROOM): **WALKER ZANGER**. SINK: **SONOMA CAST STONE**. SINK FITTINGS: **GROHE**. METALWORK: **MILLENIUM STEEL + RACK**. MILLWORK: **SANDKAMP WOODWORKS**. AUDIO-VISUAL CONTRACTOR: **AUDIO, VIDEO & CONTROLS**. LANDSCAPING CONSULTANT: **BLUE ANGEL GARDEN DESIGN**. ENGINEERS: **ROBERT SILMAN ASSOCIATES** (STRUCTURAL); **D'ANTONIO CONSULTING ENGINEERS** (MEP); **ACOUSTILOG** (ACOUSTICAL). GENERAL CONTRACTOR: **CUADRO INTERIORS**.



*Clockwise from top left: The kitchen's custom table, benches, and stools were built from 125-year-old Douglas fir salvaged from the demolished Whitlock Cordage rope factory in Jersey City. Slate tile complements the bar's walnut counter, constructed using Japanese joinery techniques. Different slate tiles clad the powder room's walls.*