



Domino  
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## N A T E B E R K U S

### A Host's Haven

Amy Larocca

*New cookbook author Katie Lee Joel wanted a sophisticated yet comfy home to suit her entertaining style. Architect Ahmad Sardar-Afkhami and decorator Nate Berkus knocked down walls, plotted color schemes and chose furniture with a single goal in mind: transform a New York City town house into a gracious hangout for boisterous dinner parties and quiet nights alike.*

#### *A Salon for Modern Times*

When Katie Lee Joel and her husband, Billy, bought this Manhattan home two years ago, it was a warren of unremarkable rooms. But Joel, who grew up in West Virginia and has an unofficial degree in Southern hospitality, longed for a loftlike first floor conducive to both high and low entertaining – whether a grand cocktail fete or an anti-Super Bowl dinner for an entourage of friends. “The flow was the most important thing to me,” she says in her light drawl, with which she persuaded her architect, Ahmad Sardar-Afkhami, to defy the historical blueprint and allow the kitchen, dining and living rooms to inhabit one open space. Layout established, decorator Nate Berkus instilled a sense of ceremony with traditional furniture united by a calm, muted palette – a deep-set Mattaliano slipper sofa, 1940s Italian chairs, French X benches. “The neutral colors are understudies to the people, who play the lead role,” he says. A classic, symmetrical setup furthers the tranquility but is still easy to tweak; the chairs and benches adapt to different size groupings and can be pulled up to the fire an chilly nights.

#### *Not-too-proper Dining Room*

A repro French table with matching chairs is the undeniably formal focal point here. But a full view of the kitchen and the windows beyond, plus rows of built-in open shelves with all manner of cookbooks and tchotchkes, give it a loose, unscheduled quality. Although the space could

have accommodated a longer table, Joel thinks hers holds the ideal number for a dinner party: “I like being able to have one big conversation, and eight is perfect for that. My friends and I have much more fun here than if we go out to a restaurant.” The bookcases flanking the fireplace (like many of the house’s pieces, they were found on 1stdibs.com) inject another layer of informality.

#### *A Consummate Cook's Headquarters*

Joel’s 185-square-foot kitchen has all the charm and intimacy of an old-fashioned version, but the openness and the top-of-the-line amenities make it run like a serious machine. From the Wolf six-burner stove and two ovens to the garbage disposal in the center sink, every inch was designed according to function. The center island is outfitted with warming drawers – which Joel uses to time multiple courses – while the marble countertops elsewhere stay cool (perfect for making piecrust). With ready access to the dining room, Joel is free to cook and mingle simultaneously: “When I’m preparing food, I want to feel like I’m still part of the party,” she explains. The back wall that held a small bay window was replaced with a floor-to-ceiling grid of glass and steel, overlooking the garden behind the house. “I sit at the bistro table in the morning, have my coffee and look out at the trees. It’s like a European village, right in the middle of the city.”

#### *A Stately Yet Luxe Guest Room*

Hosting for Joel often involves out-of-town visitors, mostly family, and she wanted to treat them to a space that felt both special and relaxed. “I designed this room with my mom in mind,” she says. Marked by clean, graceful lines and subdued colors, a very of-the-moment mix of period pieces – like the pair of 19th-century French boiserie panels Berkus placed in niches of either side of the bed – creates a polished serenity. A flat-screen TV can be watched from under the covers, and a small balcony onto the garden makes for a country-villa atmosphere.



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"I just wanted it to be peaceful," Joel says. Luscious linens and thick curtains ensure fantastic lie-ins.

### *A Cozy Private Space*

In the second-floor den, Joel stayed slightly from the public spaces' décor with plush, textured upholstery and an extra-long, extra-cushy custom sofa. When she isn't entertaining, she's up here chilling out by the fire or watching movies. "It's an evening room, a winter room," Berkus says, noting the wall sconces and the pair of 1930s French jade glass lamps on the bureau, which cast a beguiling glow. A rich spectrum of browns, forest green and gold enhances the enveloping, away-from-it-all feel, yet, like the rest of the room, retains an air of poise and sophistication.