

Abe Lincoln

Maybe not—but this 1840 house in the West Village is now home to a childhood friend of designer Alan Tanksley

text: christine schwartz hartley photography: eric laigne

Slept Here

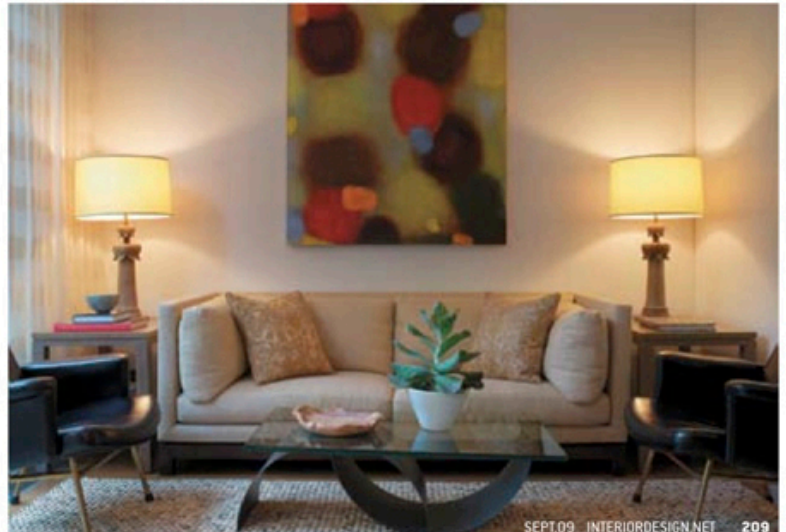
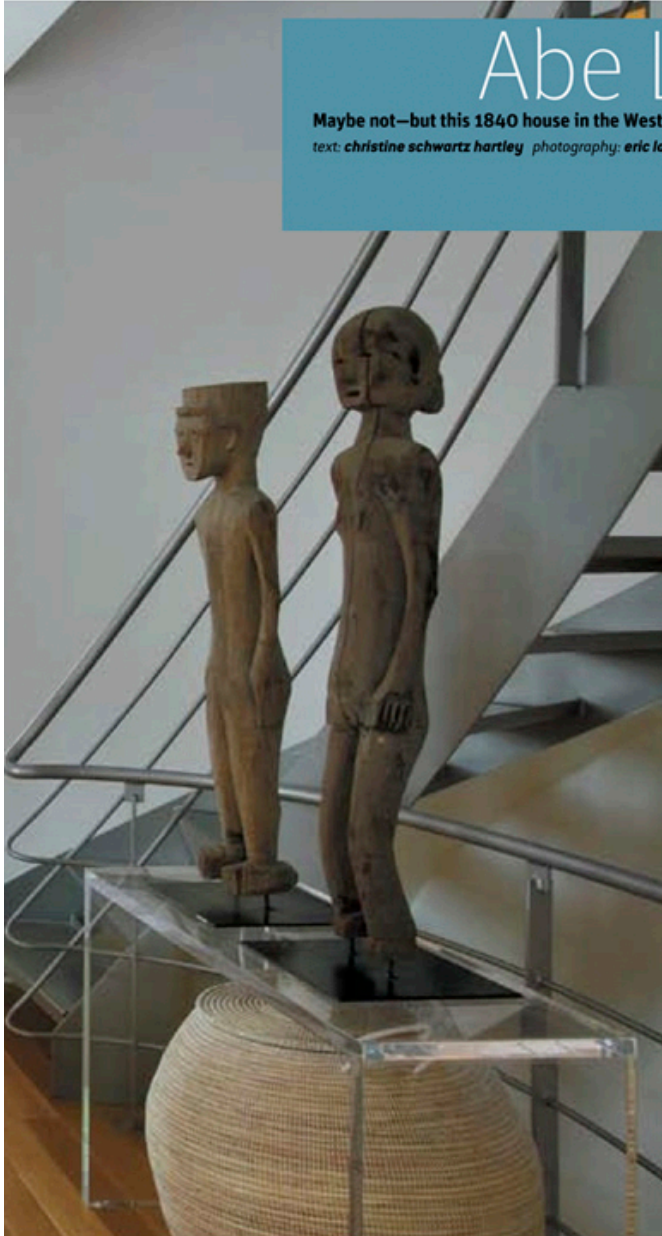
A minute ago, you were navigating the grotty, funky tumult of the West Village, with its incessant vehicular and pedestrian traffic and hodgepodge of boutiques, cafés, bars, and clubs. But here, on the third story of a Federal-style redbrick town house tucked away on a side street, all is calm and light. At the front end of the floor, windows connect the kitchen to the narrow tree-lined street below. At the rear, the living area's glass doors open onto a narrow balcony with views up to the sky, down to a tranquil garden, and across to an ivy-covered wall. Two windows with diaphanous Roman shades let in even more natural light along the wall that faces a side passage, and a stairwell midway along the opposite sidewall lets sunshine from a skylight penetrate. Consequently, the space feels substantially airier than its 15 1/2-foot width might suggest.

This luxurious urban tree house is a new project for Alan Tanksley and a repeat commission for Gates Merkulova Architects, which first encountered the property when it was still a "Dickensian slum," Zhenya Merkulova says. Built in 1840, it had been a rooming house since the 1920's—with two or three bedrooms per floor, sharing hallway bathrooms. Merkulova undertook a gut renovation in 1997 and divided the 2,250-square-foot interior into two units, with the rental apartment at the bottom. To connect the three levels of the main residence, she built an elegant staircase with silver-painted, rubber-padded steel treads. She also moved the main entrance to the rear by adding an exterior flight of stairs, which ascend from the garden to the parlor floor. ➤

Previous spread, left: A gated side passage leads to the main entrance of this town house renovated and furnished by Gates Merkulova Architects and Alan Tanksley.

Previous spread, right: The den's portraits of Abraham Lincoln, in gouache and ink on paper, are by Richard Wengenroth.

Top: Reissues of Jean Prouvé chairs surround a Danish 1960's rosewood dining table. Flooring of rift-cut, quarter-sawn white oak extends back through the living area. **Bottom, from left:** The stairwell's guardrail is steel. Stools by Shin and Tomoko Azumi pull up to the kitchen island. In the living area, Italian 1940's marble lamps flank a custom sofa upholstered in linen-cotton and an oil on canvas by Jeff Kowatch.



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