

HOW FENG SHUI SHAPED THIS CURVE-FILLED NEW YORK APARTMENT

Local firm Dash Marshall swapped dated 1980s-era details for flowing lines and fresh takes on humble materials.



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Certain events—in both life and design—seem preordained by the universe. Take the case of Manhattan homeowner Susan Tsui Shan Lee and the Brooklyn- and Detroit-based architecture office Dash Marshall.

Lee, a development consultant, was nearly 9,000 miles away from home at a conference in Cambodia when a fellow attendee tipped her off to the boutique residential architecture firm. Lee was already in talks with another designer to renovate the early-20th-century Tribeca apartment she had purchased with her husband, but she decided to give the studio a call.

Dash Marshall is not, as you might expect, a single architect. In fact, the firm is made up of three principals, Brooklyn-based Amy Yang and Ritchie Yao, and Bryan Boyer, who is based in Detroit (the name originated in 2011 as a wry, post-recession publicity stunt). Once she was back in New York, Lee met with Yang and Yao. When the architects didn't bat an eye at her request for two ovens—a big entertainer, Lee prefers to keep her sweets and savories separate—it was a done deal. “And so right there, I was just like, you know what, I am not signing a contract with the other designer,” Lee recalls.

True to form, the Dash Marshall team also didn't flinch when they toured Lee's new apartment, which hadn't been touched since it was first converted in the early 1980s and came complete with a pink-tiled bathroom, an illegally converted bedroom, a Jacuzzi in the main bedroom, and a retro kitchen. “I literally was afraid to open the cabinets because I thought I would find a dead rat,” Lee says. Yao, who had previously worked at OMA New York and Adjaye Associates, was slightly more optimistic. “It looked like a disaster, but there was also really neat stuff,” he says, like an original brick fireplace and an expansive brick wall.

But a few hurdles lie ahead. As with many New York apartments, the space was long and narrow, and the slapdash second bedroom made the floor plan increasingly muddled. In their solution, the architects hoped to delineate distinct programmatic zones but also wanted to maintain a sense of movement, in keeping with the client's interest in feng shui design principles. “One of the key things with feng shui is the idea of flow; you shouldn't have sharp corners,” Yao explains. “So we took this literally.”



A matching central island, clad in flecked Caesarstone solid surfacing, provides additional work space and is illuminated by a trio of Ladies & Gentlemen globe pendants.

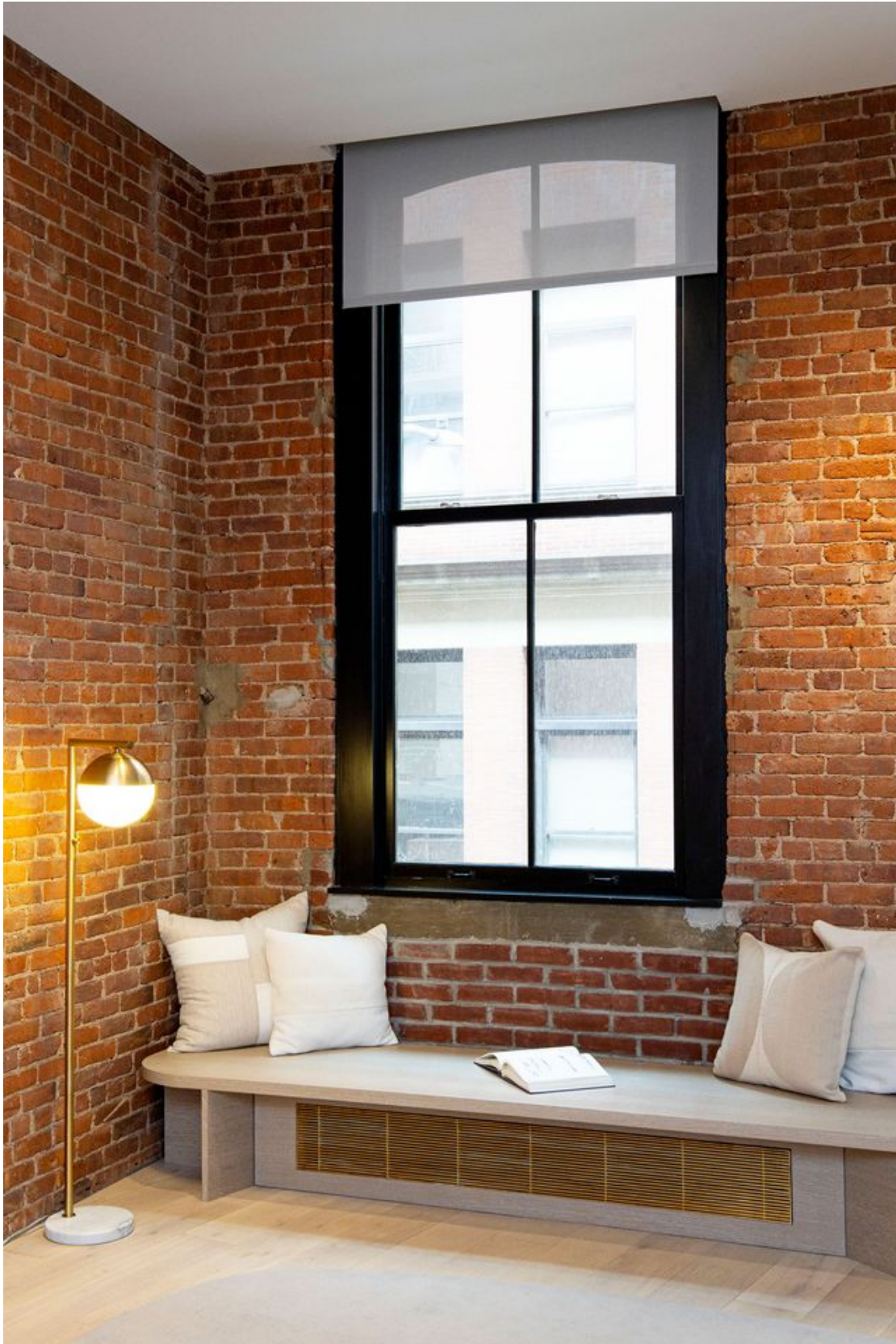
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The Kitchen

Yao and Yang focused most of their design energy (and budget) on the heart of the home—the kitchen. Rather than blocks of shelving and cabinetry, they wanted to create one cohesive, curving unit, abiding by feng shui tenets.

But how do you make cupboards “flow”? The architects found their material match in tambour, a type of paneling consisting of timber battens fastened to a flexible backing, enabling them to achieve dramatic curves and to cleverly camouflage cabinets, range hoods, and even the refrigerator in pale oak. Some cabinets cantilever a few inches over the others, providing room for a library-style ladder and imbuing the setup with an almost geological quality: “It’s like some of the caverns that you see in Utah when you go hiking,” Yao observes.

Despite its Zaha Hadid–esque curves, the cabinetry was built entirely by hand. On installation day, the unit arrived in several chunks that were hoisted in through the exterior windows. But it was worth the effort: “I really love my kitchen,” Lee says. “I’m actually working at the island now.”



The flooring is white oak, and the architects opted to keep the brick surfaces as is: “It’s a nice quality that’s original to the space,” Yao explains. The floor lamp is by Flos.

THE LOUNGES

This loft may indeed be lofty, but the architects sought to create discrete spots where Lee, her husband, and a myriad of visitors could relax. In the front of the apartment, an unsightly radiator became the perfect spot for a custom curved window seat. “You can take a cup of coffee in the morning and sit back, bask in the sun, and read the newspaper,” Yao says.



The architects removed an illegally converted bedroom to create space for a small seating area and a powder room. The tambour kitchen (*left*) transitions cleanly to the drywall surfaces.

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At the opposite end of the flat are two more flexible seating areas, one in front of the brick fireplace and another in the footprint of the former bedroom. There, a round artwork by Pamela Jordan provides a pop of color to the otherwise neutral, Zen-like space.

Worth noting is Dash Marshall’s sculptural use of drywall throughout the apartment: The tambour kitchen seems to “stitch” into it, while the corners that remain are as smooth as marzipan. “We always think that drywall gets a bad rap,” Yao says. “Obviously, there’s a lot of terrible drywall application, but if you mold it, you get shadows, you get texture.”



The main bedroom. According to the principles of feng shui, you should align your bed with the energy emanating from the door.

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THE MAIN BEDROOM SUITE

Dash Marshall kept the bedroom fairly simple—white walls, white oak flooring, exposed brick—but went all out in the main bathroom. “In our first meeting,” Yao recalls, “Susan showed us textures that she liked. And one of them was an image of large pebbles. And we were like, ‘Why don’t we design a grotto?’”



The main bathroom features a custom brass mirror and pebble-clad surfaces.

Esther Choi



“It definitely has a ’70s vibe to it, but we like the juxtaposition of that with really clean modern lines,” Yao says.

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The architects covered the walls and floors in a smooth pebble aggregate. Cove lights lend the space a primordial feel. “We like to take the client into different worlds,” Yao explains.

It’s a new world where Lee and her husband, for their part, feel perfectly at home. “I can’t say enough about how happy I am,” Lee says, adding that she has already hosted gatherings of relatives and friends. “I think things happen for a reason.”



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