

Claire Benoist was at a wine tasting in Long Island when a real estate ad popped up on her phone. She idly clicked on it, and a listing for an 1892 iron foundry-turned-residence flashed onto her screen. "I couldn't wrap my head around it! Here was this huge loft-like space that I had dreamt of having in the city all through my twenties," she says. She showed it to her husband, Derek Kilner, who laughed. "The whole time I was growing up, my parents would buy these weird old places," says Claire. Her research scientist parents—her father, French; her mother, American—met at a lab in Strasbourg, had Claire in Palo Alto, and then returned to France, where they lived until Claire was sixteen and the family relocated one last time, to Boston.

Finding and renovating a shuttered iron foundry/former artist commune had the reassuring feeling of history repeating itself for Claire. When she was a baby, her parents bought an eighteenth-century traditional Alsatian half-timbered house in a small town outside of Strasbourg and their first winter there the family lived with plastic sheeting covering the holes where the old windows had been. Then, when Claire was eleven, her parents worked with an architect to convert former bank offices in Strasbourg into an

SOMERS



1892







apartment, tearing down the tiny cubicles and creating an open living space. At their front entry was a triple-reinforced vault door. But while Claire is, in her words, “reckless and emotional,” Derek is pragmatic. As it turns out, this is the ideal combination when embarking on an ambitious renovation of a historical industrial building.

When the couple first saw the space, the kitchen, living room, and dining room were crowded together in the basement, and the bedroom occupied what is now their kitchen on the second floor. They whitewashed the basement and poured white concrete floors, repurposing it as a space for guests. Then they moved the kitchen upstairs, beneath the overhang of a lofted bedroom that overlooks most of the second floor (“My grandparents had a little lofted space at their home in Paris just like this one and it reminds me of my childhood,” says Claire). The view from there is of a scene shaped by Claire’s keen eye—honed through her career as a beauty and still-life photographer. Throughout the home modern pieces mingle effortlessly with her parents’ antiques.

“It’s a very old house with a modern renovation and the furniture mirrors that,” she says. One piece, a formidable wood slab table—an early purchase made by Claire’s parents for their home in Strasbourg—anchors the kitchen with a weighty familiarity. “I have a picture of this table from my fifth birthday party with all my friends sitting around it and a big cake in the middle,” says Claire. Her parents had the table—along with a Seltz bedroom set and a round Pierre Chapo dining table that can be found softening the corner of Claire and Derek’s bedroom—brought over from France when they moved to Boston.

“It was so nice to have something real to start with,” Claire says of her parents’ pieces. “We didn’t have plans for this,”—a gut renovation of an old foundry—“but when I saw the space I realized that *this* could be the plan. When I walked in and saw the possibilities, I felt like I could breathe.”









A Malm fireplace standing center stage in the living room highlights the soaring ceiling with its graceful lines and makes for a snug focal point in winter.







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UPSTATE



A large seating cushion at the front entrance can be tucked away in a hidden compartment when not in use. A Panton chair reframes an antique table that belonged to Claire's great-grandmother.

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A vintage Seltz bedroom set and a Pierre Chapo table that belonged to Claire's parents find a home in the bedroom.

