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Madison Modern

Saarinen's subtle curves find a warm refuge on Madison Avenue

Amongst the myriad of elegant and poised pied-à-terres on Manhattan's Madison Ave. there exists a duplex that tones things down. Clean lines, organic geometries, and a cream colored palette define Leonora Mahle's interior design of the Madison Avenue duplex. The predominant beige palette is derived from the living room area rug, which is a 19th century antique from Beauvais Carpets. Given its uniqueness and grandeur, the living room area rug set the tone for the interior. Both Mahle and the clients agreed to juxtapose the antiquity of the rug and accessories with classic, mid-century modern pieces.

About the project, Mahle noted, "the clients wanted the space to feel calm and peaceful." For Mahle, this meant keeping the space open and airy – minimizing any obstruction to the natural flow of the space.



A Knoll Saarinen Oval Dining Table with Saarinen Side Chairs. Photography by Patrick Cline.

Bright and lasting sunlight permeates the entire duplex. Rather than oppose it with a darker palette as to create a dimming effect, Mahle harnessed the warmth and intensity of the light with shades of beige and off-white – always keeping in mind the original color of the 19th century area rug. The result is an inviting space that feels as warm as it is clean.

In order to maintain a sense of openness, Mahle used predominantly modern furniture for its ability to subtly complete, rather than define, a space. In the living room, a Noguchi coffee table, with its organic curvatures, brings together the more rectilinear components of the surrounding book shelf and sofa. In dialogue with the soft curves of the Noguchi coffee table is an Eero Saarinen oval dining table for Knoll, located in the adjacent dining room.



The Saarinen Dining Table with an Espresso Marble Top. Photography by Patrick Cline.

Of the dining room, Mahle commented, “the table [Saarinen Oval Dining Table for Knoll] is simple and beautiful, making a relatively small room look uncluttered.” Unassuming and gracious, the Saarinen Dining Table enhances the openness of the space with its lack of table legs or angular shapes. Mahle chose an Espresso marble top to mirror the dark walnut floors, amplifying the duplex’s warmth.

Complementing the oval shape of the Saarinen Dining Table, Mahle paired the piece with Saarinen Side Chairs upholstered in an off-white fabric that matches the rest of the décor in the dining room. The wooden legs echo the wood floors and the marble table top while the off-white upholstery complements the drapery and wall color. The result is a quiet harmony of off-white and dark browns that diffuses the abundance of sunlight across the dining room.



A Noguchi coffee table in conversation with a Saarinen oval dining table.

Mahle's combination of mid-century modern and antiquity renders a welcoming and clean balance that basks in the warmth of natural light and a subdued color palette. The Madison Ave. duplex maximizes space without creating clutter, offering an organic flow that mimics the simple curves of Saarinen's designs. ♦