

Russian Novel

St. Petersburg-born beauty Inga Rubenstein and her husband, Keith, tap architect William T. Georgis to transform their sprawling Manhattan townhouse into a seriously chic art-filled showplace

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Inga Rubenstein stands in the double-height sitting room of the Manhattan townhouse she shares with her husband, Keith, and their teenage son. The couple worked with William T. Georgis Architect on a gut renovation of the 1903 building. **Opposite:** In one corner of the room, paintings by Marilyn Minter (left) and Rob Pruitt hang above a custom-made banquette with Edelman-leather upholstery; the circa-1725 gilt-wood mirror is from Galerie J. Kugel, the 19th-century armchair and stools are from Mallett, and the antique Axminster rug is from F. J. Hakimian. For details see Sources.



In the entrance hall, a Jean-Michel Othoniel glass-bead sculpture is positioned next to the staircase. A photo work by Cindy Sherman hangs on the far wall, and the light piece over the mantel is by Tim Noble and Sue Webster; the original marble-and-malachite mosaic floor was discovered during the renovation.

Walk into the entrance hall of Inga and Keith Rubenstein's historic Manhattan townhouse,

and the first thing that hits you is the scale: of the massive carved mantel, the sweeping marble staircase, the oversize artworks—including one by Tim Noble and Sue Webster that spells out FOREVER in blinking carnival-style lights. The piece serves as a kind of emblem for the 14,000-square-foot, five-level Beaux Arts limestone residence. Constructed in 1903 by John H. Duncan (the architect of Grant's Tomb), the home was in a deteriorating state when the Rubensteins bought it in 2007. The building had been chopped up into multiple units, requiring a three-year top-to-bottom renovation. "This house has lasted for more than 100 years," says Keith,

leaning back against the stairway's gilded banister. "And I'm happy to say that now it will last—maybe not forever but at least 100 more."

A New Jersey-born real-estate investor who heads the firm Somerset Partners, Keith met Inga, a former model from Russia, in 1997. "Inga was referred to me for a legal matter involving real estate," he recounts. "So in essence, real estate brought us together." They married a few years later and had a son, Keith Jr., now 16. After living downtown for nearly a decade, they found themselves captivated by the possibilities the Upper East Side townhouse offered. (They weren't the only





ones smitten—according to newspaper reports, Madonna was among the dwelling’s potential buyers.) To bring back the residence’s Gilded Age splendor, the couple enlisted architect and designer William T. Georgis. “I was impressed by their enthusiasm, vision, and joie de vivre,” Georgis says of the Rubensteins. “The house has very grand spaces that can be a challenge, but if you know Inga, you know she can pull it off!”

The Rubensteins are noted for their over-the-top parties, and this home—a stunning showcase for blue-chip contemporary art and 21st-century design as well as the best in artisanal craftsmanship—is

nothing if not made for social gatherings. After entering the majestic foyer, guests are ushered up the curving staircase to the formal living and dining spaces, where 17-foot ceilings bordered with intricate cornices provide serious visual drama. They also offer theater-appropriate acoustics, tested out by no less than renowned opera singer Vittorio Grigolo, a close friend of the Rubensteins’ who has given impromptu performances at parties. Small seated dinners are served at a Marc Newson laminated-resin table surrounded by velvet-clad Newson chairs, while the walls display monumental works by Jeff Koons, Rob Pruitt, Dan Colen, and

Above: Grouped beneath a Damien Hirst butterfly painting in the sitting room are a custom-made sofa in a Pollack fabric, a Willy Rizzo cocktail table, a pair of Maria Pergay stainless-steel stools, and Louis XVI gilt-wood armchairs from Galerie J. Kugel covered in an Old World Weavers velvet.



others. The sumptuous parquetry underfoot is based on floors at Pavlovsk Palace in St. Petersburg, one of the decor's more prominent nods to Inga's roots.

After dinner, guests often head upstairs. "The whole top of the house," Georgis remarks, "is a sort of pleasure dome." The rooftop terrace has views across the neighborhood, including glimpses of Central Park (and, Keith jokes, of his wife's favorite Madison Avenue shops), while the rooms on the level below make up what Keith refers to as the "after-hours" floor. There's a billiard room, where the designer paneled the walls in a deep burgundy Hermès leather and installed inviting fireside seating that has accommodated many cocktail-infused late-night discussions. Between that space and a cozy media room is an old-school bar modeled after the Plaza hotel's famous Oak Bar. The Rubensteins make sure it is always well stocked: "I believe in serving great food," Inga attests, "and the liquor needs to be equally good!"

Across the hall is a smoking room equipped with an exhaust system and outfitted with suede, brass, and chrome furnishings. Glowing against the high-gloss black walls is a Tracey Emin neon work that reads *WITH YOU I WANT TO LIVE*, while Georgis lined the adjoining powder room's walls in bullet-cracked mirror.

As stylishly decadent as all that might sound, when it's just the couple and their son, they tend to spend a lot of low-key time in the welcoming kitchen and adjacent family room, watching TV or just relaxing. Inga and Keith also have their own spectacular retreats. Hers is a shimmering, silvery suite they call "Inga's world," featuring her bath, office, and closet. "Inga loves clothes, and clothes love Inga," Georgis says. Included are display shelves for her collection of designer handbags, a temperature-controlled



Left, from top: A Piotr Ukiński resin painting provides a striking contrast to the library's brass-trimmed millwork devised by William T. Georgis; the Regency armchairs are attributed to Morel and Hughes. The room's 19th-century F&C Osler chandelier is from Nesle, and the antique Aubusson carpet is from F. J. Hakimian. **Opposite:** Works by Rob Pruitt (left) and Jeff Koons enliven the dining room, where the parquet floor is based on one in St. Petersburg's Pavlovsk Palace; Marc Newson designed the table and the chairs, which are upholstered in a Pierre Frey velvet.





Left, from top: An antique light fixture from Marvin Alexander is installed in the breakfast area, above an Armani/Casa table surrounded by Willy Rizzo chairs, while an Anne Collier photograph hangs behind a Jeff Koons Puppy vase. Willy Rizzo stools line the island in the kitchen, which is outfitted with cabinetry by Smallbone of Devizes and a La Cornue range and hood. **Opposite:** An Art Deco-style rock-crystal chandelier by Alexandre Vossion crowns the smoking room, where walls painted in a high-gloss Benjamin Moore black host a Marilyn Minter photograph and a neon work by Tracey Emin; the curtains are of a Larsen fabric, and the Carlo Mollino stools, covered in a J. Robert Scott faux suede, are from Salon 94.

vault for furs, and, in her bath, refrigerated storage to preserve the natural cosmetics she prefers. "Inga's bath suite was my favorite room to design," Georgis says. "Creating a space for a beautiful woman to prepare herself was intriguing."

Keith's world, meanwhile—which contains a library, walk-in closet, and bath—feels like an old-school gentleman's club, distinguished by mahogany-tone lacquered millwork with bronze trim that Georgis explains was

inspired by Albert Hadley's iconic library for Brooke Astor. This is where Keith can enjoy afternoon tea while reclining in a 1920s lounge chair by Adolf Loos or catch up on some reading at a Regency table next to the fireplace, with an arresting Piotr Ukiński resin painting mounted above. (Ukiński is also responsible for the photograph of Inga's lips, *Untitled [Inga Rubenstein]*, that hangs in the couple's bedroom and was recently exhibited at the nearby Metropolitan Museum of Art.)

Soon after moving in, the couple began a steady stream of entertaining, from Inga's annual Russian New Year celebration to dinners for Valentino brand ambassador Carlos Souza and soccer superstar Cristiano Ronaldo. Earlier this year the pair hosted an engagement party for financier James Rothschild and fashion designer Nicky Hilton. Still, Inga insists her most cherished moments at home tend to be more muted. "My girlfriends come over and we do spa night," she says, referring to the Russian-style *banya* that occupies the basement, along with a gym and wine cellar. "We use the sauna and pool and have massages and eat traditional Russian food and drink lemon-ginger shots. At the end of the night, we always finish with a cold beer. It's heaven!" □









***From left:** In the master bedroom, a Roe Ethridge photograph is displayed over the William T. Georgis-designed bed, which is upholstered in a Loro Piana cashmere; a work by Adam McEwen surmounts a Jean-Henri Riesener commode acquired at Sotheby's, and the F. J. Hakimian Aubusson carpet was custom designed by Georgis. Inga's boudoir is appointed with a Waterworks tub as well as a chaise longue with a circa-1950 Tommi Parzinger base from Alan Moss; the curtains are of a Dedar fabric, and the shades are of a Rubelli sheer.*