

A New York loft with clever storage ideas

Rug designer Federica Tondato's Manhattan apartment is filled with art, vintage furniture and bespoke cabinetry to maximise the space available for her legendary dinner parties



Photo: Stephan Julliard

By Ian Phillips

7:00AM GMT 06 Mar 2015

In the New York loft of the rug designer Federica Tondato is a pair of doughnut-shaped Detecma chairs, created by a friend of her father, the theoretical physicist Tullio Regge. 'They were the first chairs to be designed by computer, using an equation,' she says. She and her sister, the London designer Allegra Hicks, posed for the catalogue. 'I still have a copy somewhere,' she says. 'I have booties, really short hair and jeans. It's so 1970s.'

They are not the only pieces in the apartment with a family link. A Franco Albini desk in the living room belonged to her grandmother; a coffee table is decorated with a map of the United States painted by Hicks; and some Max Sauze aluminium ceiling lights were in her childhood home, but never hung. 'My mother didn't like them,' she recalls. 'They ended up in the attic, until I rescued them.' Her dining table, meanwhile, is the same one on which she ate in her youth. 'I remember hating dining on glass,' she says. 'The idea of having to look at my legs and not being able to hide things under the table really haunted me.'

Both Tondato and Hicks were to some degree destined to work in design. Their father, Carlo, was an industrialist and an architecture enthusiast who commissioned a modernist glass house on a hillside outside Turin. 'It was great,' Tondato says. 'The only fault was the kitchen. For a house that big, it was ridiculously small.' After high school she moved to London to study at the **Architectural Association** and then followed up with masters degrees from both the Domus Academy in Milan and Columbia University in New York. She never planned, however, to become an architect. 'I always thought the life was miserable,' she says. 'They're almost all depressed and without jobs.'

She moved to New York in 1991 and turned to rug design after being introduced by Hicks to a manufacturer in India. Many of her motifs are inspired by submarine life, microscopic images and maps. She also has an uncanny gift for colour. 'The moment I see a colour, I can exit the room and reproduce it exactly,' she says.

Today Tondato divides her time between a flat in Paris and the New York loft, which doubles as her design studio. She says she was attracted to the space by the light, the ceiling height and its location in the Bowery. 'The area's still a bit gritty,' she says, 'and New York for me always had that rough edge.' Once home to a German bank, the building was turned into a hat factory after the Second World War. When she first visited the fourth-floor unit, it still had dips in the old rosewood floors where the presses had caused subsidence.

For the renovations she called upon Raffaella Bortoluzzi of **Labo Design Studio**, who is not only 'one of the best architects I know', but also her best friend. 'She can envisage volumes and little details like no one else,' Tondato says. To open up the space, they removed a storage room along the window wall, reduced the size of the bedroom and integrated the kitchen into the main living room (it had been behind a wall). Bortoluzzi would have liked the cooking area to be even smaller. 'She asked me, "Why don't you put in two little bar-size fridges?"' Tondato recalls. 'But I love to cook and wanted to keep the fridge the former owner left me, which is gigantic.' She also requested a stove on which she could prepare meals for up to 30.

Bortoluzzi's main intervention was the installation of wooden built-ins along the whole length of the apartment. They incorporate a storage cupboard with a spare bed above it, shelving units and kitchen cabinetry. They are made of maple scoured with vertical lines that were painted red. 'They give a rhythm to the space,' Bortoluzzi says. 'We wanted it to look highly designed.' The bookshelves incorporate panels that drop down to hide the office equipment (or 'technology monsters', as Tondato calls them) in the event of a dinner party. According to Bortoluzzi, they will be one-offs. 'Painting the wood was really labour intensive,' she says. 'The woodworker was like, "Never again. I only did it because it was for your friend."'

fedoradesign.com



The living room

The living room The Cactus coat rack was designed by Guido Drocco and Franco Mello in 1972. The aluminium floor lamp and the paper sculpture are also 1970s. The desk is by Franco Albini.



The storage cupboard

The shelves in the cupboard where Tondato stores work materials are also the ladder to a spare bed on a mezzanine level.



The dining and office area

The glass dining table is from Tondato's childhood home. The leather-seated chairs are 1960s Danish, and the desk chair is Eames. The cabinetry throughout is maple wood scoured with vertical lines that have been painted red.



The bedroom

The rug is Assyrian, a cotton dhurrie designed by Tondato for her firm, Fedora Design. The cotton bedspread is from West Elm (westelm.co.uk). The small table is by Allegra Hicks (allegrahicks.com).



The kitchen

The yellow pendant light is 1960s Venini. The kitchen rug is Flap and the hallway runner is Together, both from Fedora Design. The red-lacquered ladder was custom made by Spiral Stairs of America (spiralstairsofamerica.com).

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