



GREAT ROOMS | 8:05 A.M.

A Brooklyn Storefront Church Finds New Life As a Family Home

Virginie Sommet's latest project, in Ocean Hill

By Wendy Goodman

Great Rooms

A visual diary
by Design
Editor Wendy
Goodman.



The Spiral Stairs: The stairs were added to link the ground floor to the childrens' rooms on the second floor. The dining table and blue velvet sofa is from Rove Concepts. Sommet also exposed the original beams of the ceiling during the renovation. The discreet track lighting is LED. Photo: Kiritin Beyer

We met at a birthday party," artist/designer [Virginie Sommet](#) says of the client for this project, who was at the time living in a condo in Queens but wanted to buy a building where she could live (and have a garden) but also have rental income. Sommet, who grew up in Normandy and owned a ballet school in Paris before moving to New York and starting work for developers doing design projects, offered to help. After all, she'd redone [her own home in Bed-Stuy](#), which led to working with private clients, and was always up for a challenge.

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The Old Façade. Photo: Courtesy of Virginia Sommet

They found it in a disused three-story 1899 building in Ocean Hill, Brooklyn. It had been a church on the ground floor, with apartments above, and at once they saw the potential for a new beginning.

"It was not easy," Sommet recalls, "because she had to change the CofO." Sommet's client had loved her renovation of her townhouse and told her that "she wanted the same." Which meant a clean minimalist space, with the designer's trademarked "Virginie Peekaboo" cabinets that can look like giant exclamation points or mysterious oval pods floating on the walls. (Sommet is not fond of right angles: "For me square is boring, Virginie Peekaboo is not!")

The former sanctuary became a loft-like space with the kitchen in front and the client's bedroom in the back, opening onto the new garden. The two kids' bedrooms were created on the second floor, connected by a new spiral staircase which Sommet designed herself. "I bought a custom metal stair for \$2,500, as the base, and then worked with three carpenters eight hours a day for three weeks," she says. "I researched materials and I had to be with them all along because they had never done that before." The rest of the second floor, as well as the top floor, became rental apartments.

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The New Façade: “There were originally two little windows,” Sommet says of the ground floor, which she opened up with sliding doors from Jeld-Wen and planted bamboo from Lewis Bamboo, which grew in to shield the interior space from view. There is a mechanized roller-shutter system from Somfy installed by Long Island Weather Protection.



The Dining Room: The view from the dining table toward the living room and beyond that the client's bedroom and garden. The Zuri Ronde Chair can be seen in back of the silver pouf from Etsy, on the left.



The Kitchen: The custom elongated cabinets with covers are called "Virginie Pekaboo," designed by Virginie Sommet. The countertop square cabinets are from MC Kitchen, the stools are Equino Chrome Stools, and the cooking range and fridge are from Fisher & Paykel.



The Half-Bath: She calls this the Disco Powder Room with “Silver Uniform Brick Mirror Tile” found at Price Stone. The diminutive white sink is 18” and available at Price Stone, and the glass medicine cabinet is from Ikea.



The Living Room by the Garden: Sommet says, "I got inspired by the architect Elizabeth Roberts. I saw a photograph on her website of a plant growing on the wall inside, so I wanted to do the same thing for my client, but we didn't make an area in the floor for that." Sommet improvised on the idea with planters instead along with a trove of silver Christmas balls and two plastic spheres she originally bought for the garden.



The Bedroom: It almost feels alfresco with a sliding glass door by Panoramic Doors. The ink and acrylic art on the wall above the bed is by [Christian Holmes](#) and the delightful Pom Pom fringe bedcover is from [Etsy](#).



Bedroom, With Wall Closed:

The bedroom can be made private by pulling out the 10' sliding wall. "I wanted to have more space in the living room while having a full view of the garden," Sommet says.



The Garden: Sommet transformed the backyard with custom-made planters and wood fences and wood-floored terrace. The outdoor dining table is from Rove Concepts and the sofa and coffee table are from Ikea. The chairs are from Ebern Designs. The canopied round bed behind the table is from Modway Convene Canopy.

Photographs by **Kiritin Beyer**

