

A

BIG



The tin ceiling that started it all.

The hanging light fixtures are Thomas O'Brien's "Eugene" model.

The KITCHEN (located on the far end of the box).

The SHOWER (with the brass door slid open).

The BEDROOM (when the shower is open, the bedroom is closed).

N

A

# BOX



The unlacquered brass  
will mellow and patinate over time.

The owner-  
designers planned  
to gut this former  
haberdashery  
and start anew.  
But then ...

The aluminum coffee  
table is the "Martini,"  
from West Elm, and  
the sofa is from B&B Italia.

# STORE



A second full bathroom, with hand shower and floor drain.

The blue paint is Pratt & Lambert "Spanish Blue."

The Eames fiberglass stacking chairs came out of a Dumpster.



Soapstone counters, chosen in part because they'll show age and patina with use.


The sconces are vintage, from Gowanus's Big Reuse.



"MARC GETS EXCITED about real estate; I get excited about architecture and design," says Jonathan Massey, who this summer became the dean of the University of Michigan's Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning. Six years ago, Massey and his husband, Marc Norman, an urban planner, and professor at Taubman, went looking for a pied-à-terre in Brooklyn that had some outdoor space.

The building Norman found, on Grand Street in Williamsburg, had two apartments upstairs and a 450-square-foot studio that had once been a storefront. (A World War II-era tax photo shows it as a haberdashery. That was before the BQE turned a bustling street into an almost-dead end.) After working on an upstairs apartment, they planned to gut the ground-floor space to make an apartment for themselves. Early in the process, they found an intact tin ceiling hiding above the Sheetrock. The intricate stampings released something unexpected in them: a desire for period detail. As an architectural historian, Massey has written about ornament—his 2009

DIAGRAM BY JASON LEE



"I WAS  
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AND  
STAINLESS  
STEEL."

The double shower drains through a cedar floor—“almost like an outdoor shower,” says Norman.

brass, for a vaguely retro, vaguely nautical effect. “I was tired of chrome and stainless steel,” says Massey. Almost a piece of furniture in the room, it’s flanked by a ten-foot-

book, *Crystal and Arabesque*, is about the transition from historicist to modernist design in the first half of the 20th century. “There’s a hunger to connect with traditions other than modernism,” says Massey, 48, who tentatively labels that urge neo-postmodernism.

But they did not forgo the crisp edges of mid-century, either. Massey hired Zach Seibold, a former student with a construction background, to build a box that would contain the couple’s bed and bathroom. “It was a way to maintain an open plan but still have a closed bedroom,” says Norman, 50, who explains that he can’t sleep unless he has “a space that’s completely dark.” The couple covered the plywood box in sheets of marine

long table, made from a pair of solid-wood doors, and a church pew donated by a friend, which reminds the couple of the banquettes in some of their favorite restaurants. A soapstone backsplash and brass bathroom fittings add to the can’t-quite-place-the-period look.

Massey and Norman have found that living on the ground floor is a great way to get to know the neighbors. When they married three years ago, they celebrated with a block party outside. They’re not selling the building, though they’ll be spending most of their time in Michigan for the foreseeable future. The light-tight brass box will be there when they’re back in town. FRED BERNSTEIN