

**WEIL FRIEDMAN  
ARCHITECTS |**

Architects Greta Weil (*left*) and Barbara Friedman (*right*) also bring interior design skills to their projects. They not only tailor clean, chic solutions for any room – from a banquette for stylish seating in a high-end kitchen to custom cabinetry – but also select fabrics, furniture, light fixtures, window treatments, carpets, and in some cases, art.

# FEMININE MYSTIQUE

Meet two architects who bring sense and sensibility to every project they take on, from Park Avenue penthouse to Connecticut estate.

*Text by Alice Garbarini Hurley  
Photography by Josh Nefsky*

**PROJECT | Airy City Dwelling: Gut Renovation & Interior Design**

Weil Friedman completed a gut renovation on this Park Avenue duplex in a prewar building from 1929. "Some of the original partitions remained, but everything else is new, including the windows," notes Friedman. The pair designed all the paneling and custom cabinetry, as well as the elegant wrought-iron and mahogany staircase. The homeowner loves birds, so the architects hired artist Joel Schwartz – who had done the railing – to make a few to perch along it, including at the curved base. "We brought back the feel of a prewar apartment even with contemporary amenities," says Friedman.

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heir clean architectural style is evident from the moment Greta Weil and Barbara Friedman meet a reporter in their ground floor space – formerly the servants' quarters of an 1890s brownstone on 93rd Street off Madison Avenue, in the Carnegie Hill area of Upper Manhattan.

Steaming espresso, the office drink, is served in a pristine square white cup balanced on a square white saucer. Tightly-budded red and white carnations, gathered casually, stand in a crystal-clear glass cube.

The founding partners of Weil Friedman Architects – Weil who received her Masters of Architecture degree from Columbia University and Friedman who received hers from the University of Pennsylvania – have a dazzling portfolio of projects.

The roster includes a perfectly proportioned Upper East Side pied-à-terre; a Fifth Avenue residence for an art collector; a 12-room Park Avenue duplex; an East Hampton compound; a Greenwich, CT estate; a Georgetown townhouse; and an 1830s farmhouse restoration in Orient, NY.

The women met more than 20 years ago when they worked at the large architectural firm KPF (Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates) on projects like a corporate headquarters in Washington, D.C., and a soaring office building on Fifth Avenue. When they started families, they branched out on their own – choosing to open shop in the neighborhood where their children attended school – and the experience of mothering affected their work in a subtle but significant way.

"Not to be sexist, but male architects seem much more involved with how things look," says Weil. "Since we have kids, we know what it's like to pull a highchair up to a counter that it doesn't fit under. We care about how a design looks and how it works." Finishing her partner's thoughts, Friedman adds, "Each project is unique, but we always want the result to be clean, refined, and classic."



#### UPTOWN WISH LIST

"More often than not, we do a gut renovation," says Friedman. Many clients want them to transform an apartment in a prewar building – with a tiny kitchen and maids'/staff space – into a residence with a spacious kitchen. "The big kitchen doesn't always work with the bones of traditional New York City apartments; that's one of our biggest challenges," adds Weil. The 12-room Park Avenue duplex had two small maid's rooms near the kitchen. The partners gutted the space, incorporated one maid's room into the kitchen area and transformed the other into a full bath and storage area.

"People want loft-like apartments on the Upper East Side," Weil notes, peering over trendy Eyebobs reading glasses with tortoise and yellow frames. "They want to cook and entertain. And they want large master bathrooms."

#### CLEAN & GREEN

Both LEED-certified – versed in sustainable options, thanks to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design training – Weil Friedman makes chic choices that are good for the planet, too. One example is resilient, comfortable cork flooring, common in the 1950s and considered a green option now. While the bark of the Cork Oak tree is stripped periodically to get the material, the trees live about 200 years.





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"People use cork flooring everywhere. It's wherever you want it," says Weil. She points out that white is always right, too, and the pair uses a lot of low-VOC paint. "White and clean has always been popular, but is even more popular now," she adds.

They also have an eye for signature lighting, like a modern cluster of pendant lights, designed for a kitchen in collaboration with artisan Mark Figueredo of East Hampton. When possible, they use LED light bulbs, which last longer and use less energy.

### BIG APPLE CHALLENGES

New York City buildings have their own set of idiosyncrasies that contractors, homeowners, building management and architects like Weil and Friedman have to navigate around.

At each New York City site, the pair has to submit their plans to the building architect, as well as the City Buildings Department to be sure they're not violating structural or plumbing codes. They often have to run designs by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. They have to take heed of what co-op boards say, like the time a board would not allow a sink in the kitchen island of a Park Avenue kitchen.

Beyond that, Weil notes, many Fifth Avenue and Park Avenue apartments have a "summer rule" that allows construction only in July and August, which can lead to a stressful time crunch. "The fancier the building, the tighter the limitations," she says. Summer construction often has to stop by 4 p.m.

And something that might be easy in the suburbs can be challenging in the city, such as moving in a Sub-Zero refrigerator. The top has to be removed in order to fit the appliance on the service elevator in an older building.

Weil Friedman has even fitted sound vibration isolation pads under washing machines so the noise and rumbling of the spin cycle won't disturb the homeowners – or the neighbors in the apartment underneath.

At country estates, the architects have a lot more freedom but still honor historical elements. When they designed a renovation for an 1865 farmhouse on Shelter Island, they left the well-loved antique cypress floors intact.

Aside from the beautiful, timeworn façade of their own brownstone office, the original, ornate metal window grilles are the only sign inside that the architects' home base is in a late 19th century building rather than a modern space. Fittingly, they found a way to be thoroughly sleek and efficient while working within the framework of old New York. ■



### PROJECT |

#### Upper East Side Pied-à-terre: Gut Renovation & Interior Design

Finely detailed jewel of a place, gutted by Weil Friedman from the bottom up. The pair also hand-selected every detail: carpets, furniture, fabrics, lighting, window treatments and accessories.

### PROJECT |

#### Easy Country Living: Renovation & Addition

This Shelter Island farmhouse dates to 1865. It was used as a summer home just before Weil Friedman was hired to renovate it and to add a kitchen, turning it into a year-round treasure for the owners when they retired. The team kept the bones of the old homestead but designed an expansive kitchen with a five-foot-square island for the cook in residence, a professional who was planning to offer private lessons and classes. ▶



