

# ZEN AND THE ART OF URBAN EXISTENCE: ABINGTON HOUSE INTERIORS BY CLODAGH

Jen Renzi | September 29, 2014 |

Clodagh's reputation precedes her: the shamanistic first-name-only moniker, the devotion to feng shui, the contemplative mood that suffuses both her personality and her work. Her vibe is earth mother-y, her aesthetic the spatial equivalent of a deep, cleansing breath. So it's a bit jarring to witness her channeling a kung fu fighter, giving a wall a hearty thwack with her platform-shoed foot. "These are surfaces that you can kick," she says with zeal, practically goading the resilient treatment to show her what it's got.

Here at Midtown's [Abington House](#), hard-wearing elements make perfect sense. There's abundant foot traffic at the 33-story, 312-unit rental property, built by her fellow Interior Design Hall of Fame member [Robert A.M. Stern](#) for the real-estate developer [Related](#). "Tons of kids and dogs," she says—not 30 seconds later, a gaggle of hounds waltzes in, past a long red bench that happens to be a dog shape in cast stone. Longevity certainly factored into the finish choices, from the end-grain flooring used for walls to the woven vinyl sheathing an elevator lobby. "You can't kill this Chilewich!" she adds.

Brawny materials are also a conceptual hook. The redbrick building abuts the [High Line](#) park, and the erstwhile elevated railway's steel trusswork is a constant visual presence inside. Clodagh referenced the aggressively industrial character while still conjuring a sense of comfort and refuge that telegraphs you're home. "There's a real muscularity to many elements," she notes, gesturing to the block-long lobby's rivet-studded steel columns, the coppery wall backdropping reception, the craggy salvaged barn wood above the gas hearth, the lovingly worn leather on the serpentine sofa. "But the textures are stroke-able, not at all gritty."

Clodagh masterminded 12,000 square feet of public space. Reception, a mail room where an installation of rusted letters spells out words such as joy and solace, and an elevator vestibule share the main part of the lobby. Beyond are a pair of party rooms, a

pair of residents-only lounges, either for socializing or for quiet contemplation, a temporary leasing office, a business center, and an Equinox gym “just tarted up a bit,” she notes. Two model apartments, a 700-square-foot one-bedroom and a 450-square-foot studio, were part of the brief as well. Well, more than two over time: Units are renting so fast that the models keep getting relocated and re-created. Some tenants have moved right into the models as is, fully furnished with a high/low mix of designer lighting and off-the-shelf tables and upholstered seating.

Guiding every facet of the project was the word authenticity, Clodagh explains: “There’s nothing flimflam. We worked hard to make materials look like they’ve always been there. Finishes appear eroded rather than applied, as if created by powerful forces.” To wit, the black quartz composite of the reception desk’s counter, the patchwork of concrete floor slabs in most of the circulation spaces, and the fossil-embedded limestone paving at the main entrances. Before the latter arrived, the stone supplier laid out every slab at a giant warehouse, so Clodagh could finesse the arrangement prior to installation. “I drive my clients to drink with my attention to detail,” she says with a laugh. “I go as far as they’ll let me.”

Also at the entrances, bearing witness to Clodagh’s embrace of feng shui, chandeliers made from clusters of acrylic tubes create a pause. “So the energy doesn’t stream straight through the door,” she explains. Discreetly hidden throughout are tourmalines, carnelians, citrines, and other minerals with therapeutic properties. As a stand-in for a water feature, a trio of boulderlike black granite stools have seats polished to a sheen as reflective as small pools. A passing saleswoman offers her assessment: “I’ve had people say the energy in this building is so good. Ooh, I just got goose bumps!”

The energy is certainly good in the party rooms, kitted out like luxury lofts. Chunky concrete counters in the open kitchens double as bars. Rugs in ice-derived patterns anchor enveloping, sink-into-’em sectionals, while comfortably upholstered dining chairs pull up to long tables that seat 10 or 12. Since every self-respecting luxury loft needs a collection of contemporary art, Clodagh provided it. One installation comprises thousands of colored pencils. In the other party room, an acrylic light box glows on the wall.

Illumination plays an important role in the subterranean lounges. In the one intended for socializing, glass set into the ceiling around the top of the freestanding fireplace funnels in slivers of sunshine. “I like the feeling of light coming from unseen places,” Clodagh says. In the quiet room, an acoustically isolated sanctuary for serious cocooning, what appears to be a wall of windows above the banquettes turns out to be a row of light boxes, their LED sources diffused by layers of Japanese paper.

Even the elevators get in on the act, with interactive light-conducting channels embedded in the tile underfoot. “People are constantly missing their floor, because they’re looking down, entranced,” an elevator operator notes, amused.

**Project Team:** Nancie Min; Hanna Chang; Jose Jimenez; Ferratti Valerio: Clodagh. **Ismael Leyva Architects:** Architect of Record. **Brian Orter Lighting Design:** Lighting Consultant. **Cerami:** Acoustical Consultant. **Rosenwasser Grossman Consulting Engineers:** Structural Engineer. **Cosentini Associates:** MEP. **Lawler Woodwork:** Woodwork. **Spectrum:** Plasterwork. **Trueform Concrete:** Concrete Contractor. **Tutor Perini Corporation:** General Contractor.