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NEUTRAL GROUND

Black and white form an elegant base for richly layered texture and muted colors in five different projects, from a historic townhouse in Greenwich Village, New York, to a Mediterranean/Modern abode in Denver, Colorado.

BY DEBORAH L. MARTIN

DESIGNER: Tina Ramchandani/Tina Ramchandani Creative
LOCATION: Greenwich Village, NY
PHOTO CREDIT: Ellen McDermott

For the Greenwich Village home of a globe-trotting, art-loving couple who love to host cocktails and go out to dinner, Tina Ramchandani created dramatic, sophisticated spaces that reflected her clients' interests and art collection. While construction was ongoing, the couple stayed abroad in Morocco, and Ramchandani handled all the details. "They are an older couple who have been married a long time, and they are FABULOUS," Ramchandani exclaims. She shares that their art framer also frames works for MoMA, and they have several homes in Manhattan, as well as an upstate home in Hudson.

Ramchandani notes that the black-and-white palette is something that occurred naturally. "I see black as a staple. It's a bold color that adds emotion to a space. It can be dramatic, sophisticated, even calming." She saw black or deep hues in much of their art, so the dark tone naturally came into play. And while black and white are often thought of in a very modern context, Ramchandani says that they also work "beautifully with more traditional shapes and lines."

For this home, the designer didn't use a lot of color but rather brought visual interest by using a wide array of textures and materials. "Texture and a mix of materials is very important when dealing with contrasting colors." Plush fabrics, leather, and a watercolor-inspired rug from Crosby Street Studios are paired with metals, glass, stone and a variety of woods and finishes. Two walls of custom millwork add a graphic effect and provide a backdrop for small paintings, sculpture and objets. Taken together, the space feels very layered and rich, despite the monochromatic palette.

Ramchandani's own style runs along the same vein, so this was a natural fit for the designer. "By nature, I'm a neutral person. While I can appreciate color and colorful spaces, I prefer to live in a neutral space as I find it to be more serene and restful. However, I do also enjoy designing in color, and I love mixing colors, patterns and textures to create interesting environments."

SOURCES: Living room sofa and chairs, Poliform; living room rug, Crosby Street Studios; dining table, Lepere; dining chairs and living room coffee table, Molteni; custom millwork.



DESIGNER: Alison Giese

LOCATION: Great Falls, VA

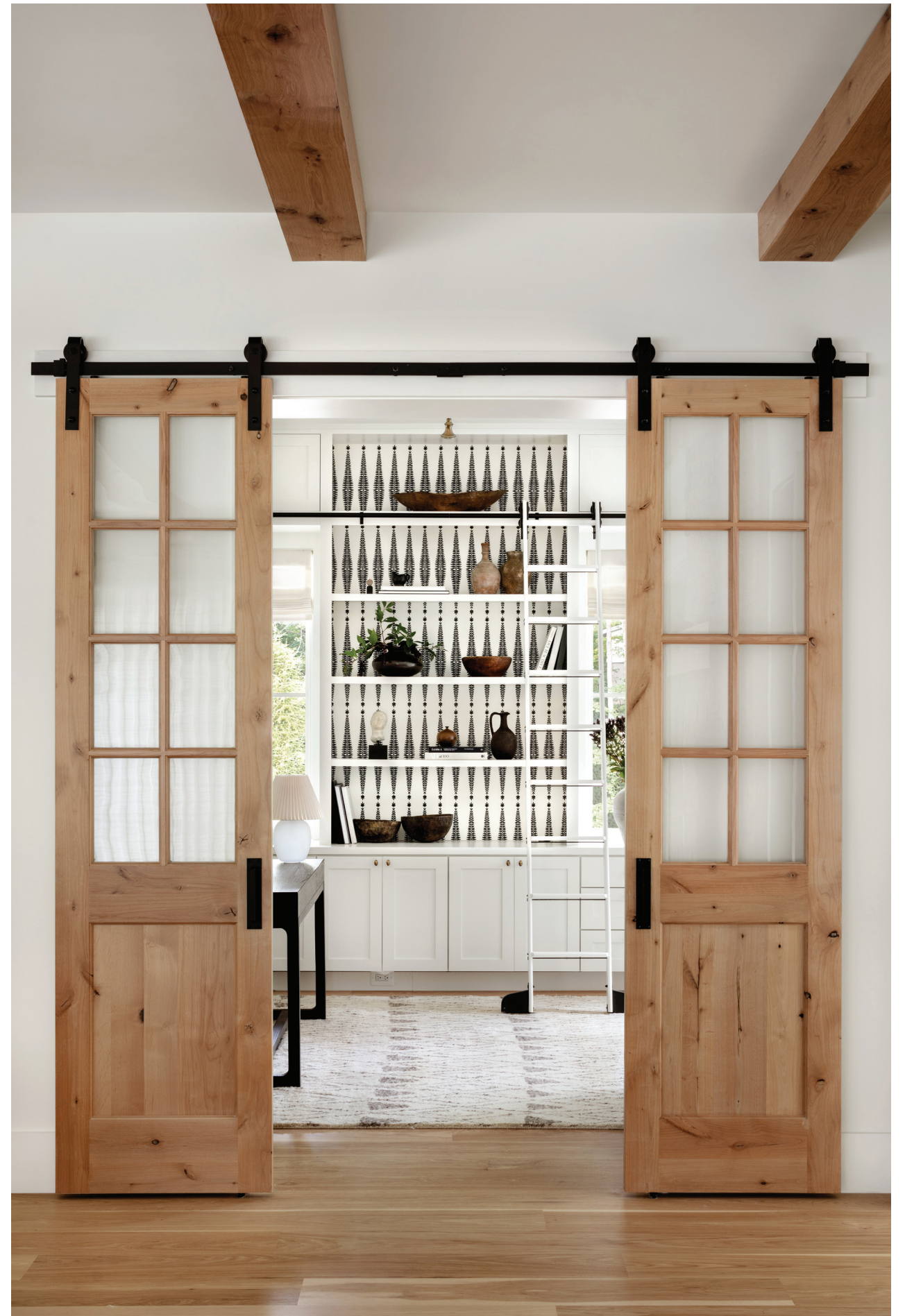
PHOTO CREDIT: Jennifer Hughes

For clients in Great Falls, Virginia, designer Alison Giese created a casual yet refined home that is a study in high contrast, warmed with organic texture and muted color. Giese explains, "They wanted the home to feel welcoming and loved the idea of letting the outdoors and the beautiful property influence the color palette and textures." A color palette of white and a deep, almost black smokey blue had already been applied to the kitchen cabinetry, so Giese continued that palette into the great room but brought in textures such as a vintage wool rug by Passerine Home, along with wood, leather and metal, to create an organic, richly layered feel. "We used items with clean lines – like the modern crosshatch chairs – to maintain the balance between crisp and cozy. In some areas we used tumbled travertine floors to add an instant warmth." In contrast to the open-plan kitchen and great room, the dining room called for a warm ambience, which Giese created with a textural wallpaper, linen fabric on the chairs and curtains, and wood furniture and millwork.

Giese's favorite space in the home is the hearth room. She shares, "The room is so architecturally striking, particularly as you approach it from the dining room. The vaulted ceiling with dark beams allowed us to play with scale on the fixtures. We created a seating arrangement with four chairs – a perfect place for family chats, reading or listening to music. The smokey palette of the wooden walls creates a cocoonlike space with lighter-hued upholstery to balance the darker walls. It's just the coziest space."

To add texture and visual interest to a black-and-white interior, Giese shares, "I have a mental checklist to go through: woven/natural weave (like seagrass or jute rugs, baskets or rush seats), leather, linen, velvet, metal (unlacquered brass, black iron) and wood. These textures often lend themselves to a more organic color palette, so I rely heavily on what I refer to as 'muddy' colors: greens, yellows, purples, oranges and blues that have a good amount of brown in them, so they are nuanced and complex."

SOURCES: Foyer light, Urban Electric; kitchen, dining room and bar cabinetry, Lobkovich, Inc.; hearth room rug, Merida Studio; great room rug, vintage from Passerine Home; dining room rug, vintage by District Loom.







DESIGNER: Nina Magon/Nina Magon Studio
LOCATION: Houston, TX
PHOTO CREDIT: Pär Bengtsson par@b-son.com

Nina Magon’s Houston clients wanted a very modern home with a sleek and classic color palette, but also filled with warmth and a lot of natural light. Magon was involved in this project from conception to completion – from the architectural details and space planning to the selection of finishes, and finally the furnishings, accessories and styling.

“The home was inspired by the beauty of nature and was meticulously designed to merge abundant natural light and the views of surrounding oak trees with modern interiors,” explains Magon. To celebrate the outdoors, she selected earth tones as well as natural stone and wood and layered them on a base palette of black and white, creating a retreatlike experience. The hallways are lined with wood planks to add warmth, and the finish is echoed in the kitchen cabinetry and island. Cabinetry by eggersmann and countertops in Aura Dekton by Cosentino are accented by an angular, modern chandelier by Roll & Hill. Expansive windows give the home an indoor-outdoor feel, allowing for ample views of the pool and surrounding property, and in the interior spaces, transom windows allow the continuous flow of light from one room to another.

Magon likes the interplay of texture and color against black and white. “The blend of black and white elements creates a clean and classic feeling. The pairing of these contrasting colors is bold and sophisticated and has a timeless appeal.” She shares her technique for creating these spaces. “Mixing black and white elements within a space creates eye-catching focal points and moments of drama. For example, if the walls are a nice bright white in a bedroom, you can choose a bold black bed frame, black-framed art, or dark wood flooring. The darkness draws you in and commands attention.”

Though the predominant scheme in the public spaces is black and white, Magon created some colorful moments – in blue, purple and pink – in the bedrooms for the couple’s three daughters. The primary bedroom features a bed designed by Magon in a calming shade of pale seafoam. She shares, “Sometimes there is a need for a classic and timeless color palette of black and white, and other times you really want a space to be full of color. We prefer to use a range of both because we strive to create one-of-a-kind spaces that are tailored to our client’s unique needs, wants and wildest dreams.”

SOURCES: Art in entry, *Azul Jikiliit* and *Amarillo Curcuma* by Sandra Monterroso, 2021; kitchen chandelier, Roll & Hill; cabinetry, eggersmann; countertops, Aura Dekton by Cosentino; dining table, armchair, dining chairs, sideboard by Nina Magon for Universal Furniture; rug, Arsin Rug Gallery; lighting, Vibia.



DESIGNER: FoRMA
LOCATION: Denver, CO
PHOTO CREDIT: @ Devon Banks Photography

In the middle of the pandemic, New Yorkers Trip and Jacqui Tate purchased a house in Denver's Park Hill neighborhood, sight unseen. Built in 2022, the 6,000-square-foot, Mediterranean-style house lacked interior character and was dominated by overwhelmingly yellow tones. They called in the team at FoRMA – Miroslava Brooks and Daniel Markiewicz – to give their new home some much-needed TLC. In contrast to the existing exterior, they all agreed upon a simple, clean aesthetic for the interior, which now includes a series of arched openings on the first floor, connecting and opening up the floor plan. "From the beginning, we explored interior palettes of black and white to work well with the exterior. The couple wanted to bring their New York sensibilities to the design, so we created a brighter, simpler, more open interior that incorporated some of the character of the Mediterranean-style exterior – such as arched roof elements – without being ornamental. One of the most important things for the clients was to create an airy space devoid of visual clutter that thoughtfully connects with the adjacent rooms."

The existing kitchen was inefficient and outdated, so Brooks and Markiewicz reoriented the space to allow for continuous circulation throughout the main level. A geometric blue tile backsplash is a nod to the Mediterranean style of the home. New arched openings and well-placed built-in storage units link the reconfigured kitchen to the informal living space at the front of the house. The FoRMA team also refurbished the staircase, making it a central feature of the home. To create a modern architectural look, they wrapped the staircase in a solid guardrail, painted it white and added a tailored black stripe.

Markiewicz explains, "The biggest challenge with a black-and-white palette is to make sure that the whites are all coordinated across various material surfaces – walls, ceilings, trims, cabinetry and countertops – and under both natural and artificial lighting conditions." And while they make color decisions on a project-by-project basis, they love the timelessness of black and white. "It doesn't get more fundamental than black and white," Brooks opines. "It can challenge our preconceived conventions of space. An interior black-and-white color scheme allows other items to come into focus. In the Denver house, it is the grain of the bamboo flooring, the geometric patterns of the dining room and living room chairs and the changes in natural light bouncing off surfaces throughout the day."

SOURCES: Hardware and dining room pendant, Schoolhouse; interior paint, Sherwin-Williams; surfaces, Silestone; floor and wall tile, AllModern; kitchen and dining room tables, dining room chairs, Masaya & Co.; kitchen chairs, McGee & Co.; stools, Rove Concepts; upholstery, Maiden Home; kitchen pendant, Feiss.



DESIGNER: Alicia Murphy, Alicia Murphy Design
ARCHITECT: Kevin Lichten, Lichten Architects
LOCATION: West Village, NY
PHOTO CREDIT: Brittany Ambridge

For a family of six, returning home meant a move from their uptown duplex to the West Village, where they lived when they were first married. To achieve exactly what they were looking for, they hired Kevin Lichten of Lichten Architects to update the narrow-*yet-tall* home. Alicia Murphy came on board to complete the interiors of their new space. The five-story historic townhouse needed an infusion of light and an overall update. Lichten explains, “They always longed to return to downtown. A townhouse and rear garden carriage house in the West Village were perfect to allow them to return to their old neighborhood and accommodate their lifestyle of family and very casual entertainment.”

Murphy shares that the family loves to entertain. “They wanted the home to be welcoming and casual but still have a level of formality to it. Given its location and history, our design is a mix of classic New York with a modern, unpretentious twist.” Murphy worked with a muted color palette blended with graphic black-and-white accents. Smart built-ins make the most of the limited space, and a Waterworks kitchen is an elegantly appointed workhorse. In the back, an outdoor kitchen, garden and seating area lead to a “Dad’s den.” The house provides a needed respite from the hustle of New York City life.

The existing house presented a challenge in that it had a small footprint, even though it had five floors. Lichten came up with a solution. “The architectural challenge was to unite what otherwise would be a stack of disjointed floors. We created a visually strong sculptural staircase, which required convincing the clients to devote a large portion of each floor to the spiral stair. The result was worth the sacrifice; at each level you can clearly see the floors below and above, knitting the entire house together.” To create a dramatic focal point, a massive chandelier by Cameron Design House – reminiscent of ascending Champagne bubbles – fills the space.

For Murphy, the color palette was a natural. “In this home, as in many of our projects, I use black and white as neutrals, and I soften the edges with warm textures and sculptural pieces. Black and white are very calming to me and act as a base. They are colors found in nature, making it easy to weave in color and texture to ramp up the drama.”

SOURCES: Landscape designer, Robin Key, RKLA; stylist, Martin Bourne; contractor, Highline Construction; front façade lights, Bevolo; light in stairwell, Cameron Design House; laylight, custom by Lichten Architects and produced by Gil Studios; kitchen cabinets, Waterworks; kitchen light fixture, Roll & Hill; carriage house lighting, Apparatus; carpet, Stark; chair, Atelier Purcell; sofa, custom AMD; outdoor sofa and chair, Dedon; string lights, Bover; dining table, Royal Botania; dining chairs, Gloster; planters, Atelier Vierkant; primary bath, Marble, ABC Stone.

