



Domino
February 2007

editor's letter



labor of love

When we were getting the magazine off the ground (about two years ago), interior designer Sara Bengur approached us with a bold idea: Why not get a group of the most talented young designers working today to decorate homes for families who could truly benefit from them? She had joined forces with a nonprofit, the Highbridge-Woodycrest Center, that was renovating 40 apartments for families affected by HIV/AIDS. While Woodycrest House in the South Bronx would have on-site social services like day care, health care and job training, the apartments that the tenants—some of whom had been homeless—would move into would be barren.

We signed on immediately. This design project squared perfectly with our view of homes as the foundation of our lives—the better they look and function, the happier the lives we carry on inside them. Ideally, our homes are a source of strength for dealing with the world outside, and a huge relief from it as well. And decorators, often maligned as the fluffy window dressers of architecture, are better equipped to understand this than anyone.

Well, wanting to help and actually getting this off the ground were two drastically different things! We picked the eight designers we thought would be perfect, and they listened to focus groups of prospective tenants and tried to answer their needs and anticipate their desires. Meanwhile, we hit the phones to solicit donations from companies in order to fully furnish each home. They enthusiastically agreed, despite the audacity of our requests: One sofa? Thanks, any chance we could have 39 more?

The generosity of the core team was boundless. The designers themselves pulled together the 40 homes (each decorated five identical apartments) with the help of our staff, Housing & Services, Inc., and a volunteer band of interior-design students. This project, however, never would have succeeded without one person: our style director, Dara Caponigro. Her intelligence, humanity, political skills and hard, sweaty labor kept it from faltering, and she saw every detail through from beginning to end.

The tenants' response thus far has been phenomenal—equal parts amazement, delight and gratitude. While the designers weren't showcasing their myriad talents in any peacock-ish way, which might have felt inappropriate, these homes don't shy away from high style and individual flair. One resident, Luz Solis (pictured bottom right), explained to a reporter from the *New York Times* that her apartment gave her strength and made her feel like she lived on Fifth Avenue, only to correct herself, that actually it was more like Chelsea: more downtown cool than uptown uptight. The ultimate compliment to us.

In addition to showing how decoration can be an uplifting force, these designers taught me another lesson: that ingenuity, talent and know-how can transform the character-free, white-box apartments we're all so familiar with into places no less stylish than the ones they do for their deep-pocketed clients in glorious spaces. See for yourself on page 124.



A chronological view of the domino Design Project at Woodycrest House, from top: a pre-decorated unit; designers Stefan Boublil and Gina Alvarez of The Apartment, Celerie Kemble and Ruthie Sommers; Luz Solis at home in her David Netto-designed apartment.



Deborah

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the apartment

the domino design project

8 interior designers + 1 empty apartment building + \$650,000 in donations = 40 inspiring homes for families living with HIV/AIDS

photographs by JUSTIN BERNHAUT portraits by DAVID NICOLAS text by CYNTHIA KLING

Can a good design improve lives? Can having a matching set of sheets and towels for the first time change your outlook? Can a soft shade of blue make an apartment a place of refuge? Yes, yes and yes.

The following 16 pages present a unique project: the transformation of an eight-story, 40-unit apartment building in the South Bronx into beautifully furnished homes. The uniqueness lay not just in the location but also in the challenge of the clients. The designers who *domino* invited to participate were asked to consider the physical and emotional needs of women and their families living with HIV/AIDS, many of whom had spent years in shelters. As you will see, they came up with spaces that were at once chic, serene and efficient—and life affirming. “It’s different to live in a place where everything’s been thought out,” said Rene*, a 45-year-old mother. “We never had a dining-room table before. We eat dinner together—we’d never done that before.”

The project began nearly two years ago for *domino*, when interior designer Sara Bengur approached us about joining forces. Bengur and seven other talented designers signed up to turn the bare apartments at the Woodcrest House into high-style homes. We solicited donations for everything from armoires to cutlery, and they rolled in at a generous level and pace: Pier 1 Imports gave the team carte blanche to shop its wares; Jonathan Adler donated all the bathroom accessories; Dyson offered up a yellow vacuum cleaner for each apartment; Benjamin Moore provided the paint for both the units and the public spaces.

The facility opened this past November, and the response has been tremendous. As 50-year-old Ann* first entered her apartment, she said, “Get out of here! You were in my head. I’ve got a sky-blue ceiling and a canopy bed. This is me!” We invite you to have a look at the apartments.



This is what the featureless units were like until the designers worked their magic!

We love you!

Many thanks to the companies and individuals who donated their products and time.

\$150,000
Pier 1 Imports
\$60,000
Target
\$40,000
JCPenney
\$25,000
Jonathan Adler

\$12,000-\$25,000
Benjamin Moore & Co.
Dyson
Elite Leather Company
Hunter Douglas
NettoCollection
Rogers & Goffigon Ltd.
Tai Ping Carpets
twenty2

\$10,000
eBay
Pottery Barn
Pottery Barn Kids
Umbra
Visual Comfort & Co.
White Workroom

\$5,000-\$9,999
Alexander Gorlizki
Beauvais Carpets
Bed Bath & Beyond
DKNY Home
J. Edlin Interiors Ltd.
John Robshaw
Textiles

Justine Kuriand, c/o
Mitchell-Innes & Nash
Kemble Interiors, Inc.
Ligne Roset
Nancy B. Westfall
Guadrille Wallpapers
& Fabrics, Inc.
SeaCloth
Tucker Robbins

*Names of residents have been changed to protect their privacy.

sara bengur

THE PHILOSOPHY: "When I was in treatment for breast cancer, I realized how important our surroundings are. I wanted this to be a place of healing."

DECORATING DECISIONS: "When you have a featureless box without moldings or beautiful wood floors, you can use fabrics, accessories and furniture to make a place unique," Bengur says. The designer composed her exotic sanctuary by layering patterns, textures and soft colors. The living room's sage walls and

pale-blue curtains are enriched by sturdy openwork furniture pieces that let light pass through and by cheerful geometric fabrics, in the bedroom, a white crosshatched bedspread is brightened with graphic pillows and a red mohair blanket, while the heft of the wooden headboard is counteracted by crystal lamps from JCPenney. For Bengur, art is essential for uplifting the spirit. The narrative prints over the bed, as well as the ethereal painting above the sofa, draw you in and let you get lost.



Hits of red such as a Zia-Priven pendant and a Target throw energize an earthy palette.



Headboard (with shelves) "Natural Edge" \$8,400/queen, and **Chair** "Tukuro" \$900 tuckerrobbins.com for information
Lamps "Crystal Ball" \$179 each, jcp.com
Mirror Ercole mosaic \$950 and **Wastebasket** Ercole Mosaic \$250 ABC Carpet & Home (212) 473-3000 ext. 505
Hanging lamp "Harlow" \$465 zapriven.com for information
Quilt* and **Shams*** johnrobshaw.com for stores
Throw* target.com
Faux flowers*, **Frame*** and **Dresser*** all pier1.com
Artwork Alexander Gorlizki and Riyaz Uddin original paintings from \$1,000 riyazdesign.com for information
Curtain fabric Linen "Crail" about \$134/yard, Rogers & Goffigon Ltd. (203) 532-8068
Curtain hardware Ball-finial rod set from \$23.50 Country Curtains (800) 456-0321
Rug* potterybarn.com
Wall paint Latex flat in Silver Cloud 2129-70, benjaminmoore.com for stores

* Unfortunately, these pieces are no longer available. Check the site for similar items.

Connections are key in a small space. The patterns of the pillows and the lamp shade relate to the cutouts of the armoire and side table.

Stools Steel-wire "Zig-Zag" \$480 each, tuckerrobins.com for information
*Sofa**, *Large cabinet**, *Side table**, *Red vase** and *Large glass vase** all pier1.com
Artwork Alex Schuchard "Mountain Road" \$2,800, Space B Gallery (917) 518-2385 for other works by artist
*Lamp** ebay.com
*Pillows** johnrobshaw.com
Curtain fabric Linen "Confection" about \$134/yard, Rogers & Goffigon Ltd. (205) 532-8068
Curtains White Workroom (212) 941-5910 for information
Rug Wool pass-tufted \$30/square foot, teipingcarpets.com for stores
Wall paint Latex flat in Greenmount Silk HC-3, benjaminmoore.com for stores

* Unfortunately, these pieces are no longer available. Check the site for similar items

Wire stools make quirky coffee tables that double as extra seating.