

# Village Life

When he came to New York, Benjamin Frowein, President of Schumacher, found the quintessential Greenwich Village apartment. He's made it—and the city—home.

INTERIOR DESIGN BY *Benjamin Frowein*  
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Previous pages: The Greenwich Village apartment of Benjamin Frowein reflects both his European background and his adopted New York identity. The sofa is upholstered in a Zanotta fabric and a Schumacher linen/damask. Pillows are upholstered in a silk and velvet combination from Schumacher. The Ring chair by Nanna and Jørgen Ditzel is announced with a vibrant yellow wool. This page: Original glassed wooden doors lead from the living room to the dining area. A collage by Minjung Kim and an African stool define the transitional space. Right: Floor-to-ceiling cabinetry in the dining room is backdropped with an Iksel wallpaper. The pedestal table, painted white, is vintage.







Opposite: The sunny living room, situated on the second floor of a nineteenth-century townhouse, features a Restoration Hardware mirror and rug, ivory-colored Schumacher draperies, and a pair of wall sconces designed by Adam Otlewski. This page: In the bedroom, the headboard is upholstered with a yellow Serena & Lily fabric. Bedding includes Matouk sheets and a Schumacher cover. The bedside table is a nineteenth-century antique, purchased in upstate New York.



**AS A EUROPEAN**, Benjamin (a.k.a. Benni) Frowein, understands New York. As President of Schumacher fabrics, he understands, too, how to make a house very much a home. His apartment, on the second floor of a classic nineteenth-century townhouse in New York's West Village, is small, with a wrought-iron-ladder fire escape serving as an occasional terrace. "This is all I could wish for in New York," he says, "with views from the front to other townhouses, and in the back into a green courtyard. This is New York, but I'm awakened by birds twittering. Honestly, I love it."

Upon moving to Manhattan from Berlin, following working stints in China, South Africa, and a variety of European cities, Frowein was intent on creating what he calls, "the perfect, but typical Manhattan apartment that I got to know through movies while growing up in Europe." He cites *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, in which the main character, Holly Golightly, lives in a walk-up one-bedroom apartment but manages—like Frowein in his own NYC abode—to infuse it with an element of style. "Just like in the movie, I wanted my one-bedroom walkup to feel very personal and collected and chic," says Frowein. "I love to entertain. I have a bar set up and enough opportunities for people to sit and talk."

Part of the strategy for making his small home spacious was to create a dedicated entertaining space. He transformed a tiny ancillary room into an actual dining room, where he hosts dinner parties. "I find it very important to take your meals properly and to set the table properly, when you entertain *and* for yourself." There, he has positioned a small pedestal table, around which he can seat six, "if they're really close friends, otherwise four." In fall and spring, he moves the table and chairs to a living room window, to take advantage of breezes and seasonal light.

Frowein, who has headed the Schumacher brand since 2016, admits to not having a firm background in interior design, though he has done projects for friends. "I've never officially worked as an interior designer, but I do have an eye for this. It's a personal passion of mine." He adds, as a kind of aphorism, "The more you do in your own home, the more personal your connection to the things you have. Design matters, and it changes lives."

He admits, too, to something else in his past that has determined his ability to understand the importance of elements in rooms. Frowein explains that there is a difference

between European and American sensibilities when it comes to décor. "In Europe, we never have enough space, and our history of wars means that you have to protect what you have and you have to make it work, sometimes for generations." In his native Germany, for instance, he speaks of how furniture is typically passed from generation to generation, and how every piece assumes the role of "protagonist" in a room. "We inherit furniture where I grew up. Because you want to include all of those things in your home, you make it work. Every piece becomes important. Home is more a psychological concept than even a factual one."

For his New York apartment, Frowein has deliberately kept the palette neutral, as a way to better emphasize the artworks and furnishings he owns, many of which come from his grandparents and his boyhood German home. "This is a very beautiful old building with high ceilings, and it's important to keep it feeling airy," he says. "I wanted to keep the walls in the background and play with the art." While some of the art does, indeed, qualify as conversation pieces, such as a yellow banana sculpture in the living room and paintings of red and yellow zebras, other pieces have an even more personal connection. A salon-style grouping of drawings, paintings, and prints hangs over the dining table. "Some of the works in the dining room belonged to my great-grandfather. It's a wall of memories and emotions. I love to surround myself with art that I find personal."

Yet, Frowein was intent on fashioning a modern New York home that broke from strict European traditions. While he admits to an inability "to get out of my European skin," he does embrace the more casual lifestyle that defines Manhattan. "In the living room, I try to break up conversation and conventions. I think everything in my rooms—and there aren't so many of them—speaks to one another."

Again, as a European resident of New York, Frowein "gets" what it's like to live in Manhattan. He makes it a point to always have fresh flowers on hand since "it's nice to have something living waiting for you. The first thing I do when I walk into my apartment after work, or after one of my many trips, is take a deep breath. I turn on different lights to see the rooms in their best version." ■

Frowein considers his fire escape to be something of an outdoor room in his Greenwich Village apartment.

*"I've made a home that energizes me  
while also calming me."*

*—Benjamin Frowein*

