

ALL THE BEST FOR YOUR FAMILY



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# ■ FLIPARTISTS

A Manhattan couple with six kids discover that they have a sixth sense when it comes to real estate.

BY **JANE MARGOLIES** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **DEAN KAUFMAN**



Before its makeover, this five-story Lower Manhattan building was a run-down three-story row house with a gun shop on the first floor. Owners Cortney and Robert Novogratz (here with son Breaker), who masterminded the transformation, are self-taught designers and developers.

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**HOUSE RULES**

**BRING THINGS TO THEIR LEVEL**  
**left** A low kitchen drawer is stocked with sidewalk chalk and craft supplies, to which the kids can help themselves without bothering Mom. The furniture is a mix of old ('50s French dining chairs) and new (Boffi cabinetry, IKEA high chairs).

**GIVE THEM ROOM TO MOVE**  
**bottom left** The kids go in and out freely through the kitchen's industrial garage door (pictured above), which opens to a patio. The 1850s limestone fountain there is suitable for both kid climbing and grown-up entertaining. (The Novogratzes fill it with goldfish and flowers for parties.)

**DESIGN WITH TOYS**  
**right** When Tallulah, Bellamy, and Breaker aren't frolicking on it, the Didi Dunphy-designed seesaw doubles as a stylish minimalist sculpture.



**HOUSE RULES**

**ENLIST YOUR SMALL ARMY**  
**top left** Lucite-and-steel hooks from Kartell are placed high and low so everyone can hang up their own coats.

**MAXIMIZE A ROOM'S POTENTIAL**  
**top right** In theory, the playroom (where Breaker plays architect) can be transformed into grown-up space, but, says Cortney, "half the time, the kids are here having sleepovers on the floor, so we shut the door and let them be."

**THE LIFE THAT MANHATTAN COUPLE CORTNEY AND ROBERT NOVGRATZ LEAD IS NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART.** There are six children under the age of 9—including two sets of twins—with all the playdates, pickups, drop-offs, meltdowns, sleepovers, haircuts, teacher conferences, child-care coordinating, doctor's appointments, parties, and bedtime routines that raising a large crew entails. There is their business: transforming dilapidated buildings into upscale residences, a financial and logistical high-wire act that sometimes involves working on four properties at once. And then there are the family's frequent moves, since they typically inhabit the houses they renovate before selling them—along with the furnishings—out from under themselves. (One year they relocated three times.) But the Novogratzes take their constant state of flux in stride. The parents especially have had plenty of experience with commotion: Robert, raised in Virginia, is from a family of nine children, and Georgia-born Cortney is one of seven. If they have to contend with a wall collapsing or a refrigerator handle breaking because one of the kids has been swinging on it—or a household that begins to stir at 5:15 a.m. and by 6:15 is "utter chaos," in Cortney's words—well, that's a small price to pay for the ability to spend their days *en famille*, doing what they love. "You can't sweat the small stuff," Cortney explains as she unzips 9-year-old Wolfgang's lunch bag after school to find everything she'd packed that morning still inside.



**"WE'RE NOT SO STRESSED ABOUT THE HOUSE," SAYS ROBERT. "WE HAD A BEAUTIFUL FRENCH CATHEDRAL WINDOW IN OUR PREVIOUS HOUSE, AND WOLFGANG PUT A BASEBALL RIGHT THROUGH IT. OF COURSE, WE DON'T ENCOURAGE THAT."**

## HOUSE RULES

### LET THE KIDS SHARE ROOMS

right Instead of breaking it up into little rooms, the Novogratzes turned the third floor into a boys' dorm, lining up the IKEA beds and cribs one right next to the other. "Kids don't need as much private space as we think they do," says Cortney. "Anyone who wants privacy can find it in another part of the house. Our kids know they're part of a team and a family."

### ELEVATE THE ORDINARY

bottom right Even a well-used baby activity center looks good playing off a dramatic spray-paint-and-oil work by Francisco Larios in the living room.

### CUT OFF CLUTTER AT THE PASS

bottom left In the kids' walk-in closets, laundry baskets are front and center. The boys can slam-dunk dirty clothes before hopping into the bath, which limits the number of wayward socks and shirts on the floor.

### MIX HIGH ART WITH KIDS' ART

below The landing serves as a gallery to display the children's artworks (each of them gets a frame), along with a Queen Elizabeth portrait (made of mother-of-pearl buttons) that Robert found at a vintage clothing store.



The couple's first step was renovating a brownstone 10 years ago. Robert, then a stockbroker, hit up a friend, who was an engineer, for construction advice, and he and Cortney went to work on parts of the interior themselves. Once they rented the place to Suzanne Vega, they never looked back, and Robert eventually decided to devote himself full-time to their company, named Sixx in honor of their brood. With each project, the Novogratzes have upped the ante. Walls are now troweled with Venetian plaster, and light fixtures come from shopping sprees in France. While they continue to serve as designers and realtors for their firm, they now subcontract all the construction, which gives them time for things like watching Wolfgang play basketball and leading 8-year-old Bellamy's class on a hard-hat tour of their properties.

Their current residence, originally a three-story brick row house, sits on a tiny block in Little Italy, facing a Beaux-Arts former police headquarters.



FOR ROBERT AND CORTNEY, THE PERIPATETIC NATURE OF THEIR LIFESTYLE IS A SMALL PRICE TO PAY FOR THE ABILITY TO SPEND THEIR TIME WITH THEIR SIX KIDS, DOING WORK THEY LOVE.





**HOUSE RULES**

**SHARE THE LOVE**  
right and below Eight-year-old twins Bellamy and Tallulah sleep in antique Indonesian four-poster beds. The artificial flower assemblage (under glass) was a trade-show prop for furniture maker Capellini, and the oil painting over the desks is by Donald Baechler. "Don't keep all the art in the living room," advises Courtney. "Put nice things in the kids' rooms—that way, the kids can get into art. Plus, you're going to be spending a lot of time there, too."

**SUPPORT LOCAL ARTISTS**  
bottom Yes, the Novogratzes find some amazing things on their regular trips to Parisian flea markets, but their favorite items are often homegrown (like the desk in the boys' room, designed by Cortney's friend Pilar Proffit). "A lot of the art in the house is by people we know—people we believe in supporting," she says.



THE COUPLE ARE LESS INTERESTED IN CREATING A SHOWPLACE THAN A FAMILY PLACE. "AT THE END OF THE DAY," SAYS ROBERT, "THIS IS JUST A HOME."

The Novogratzes have since refaced it with stucco, added glass-and-steel balconies, expanded the gutted shell to five levels of 1,100 square feet each, and topped it off with a kid fantasy: a mesh-domed basketball court on the roof. Although the loft-like spaces and contemporary art give the interior a modern feel, the rooms are also sprinkled with antiques the couple love—but are not too worried about getting scuffed up by rambunctious kids. They are less interested in creating a showplace than a family place. "At the end of the day," says Robert, as Breaker shimmies up the post of Bellamy's Indonesian bed, "this is just a home."

Will the Novogratzes sell the place and move on, as they have in the past? Yes, no, maybe. "This block is unique in all of New York," Robert points out. "But," his wife counters, turning properties over "is the way we make our living." And not only have the kids learned to part with their beds when a house buyer takes a liking to them—they also get the fun of helping pick out new ones. But that's not to say everything is easy come, easy go. The family will never part with the Parisian streetlights in the master suite, or a mint-condition 1960s wooden foosball table in the boys' room. The game, which is in constant use, resembles one the couple saw on their honeymoon but didn't have the money to buy. "Some things," says Cortney, "you always hold on to." 🏠



From left: Wolfgang, 9; Robert; Holleder, 1 (on shoulders); Breaker, 5; Five, 1; Cortney; Tallulah, 8; and Bellamy, 8, on their rooftop basketball court, the setting for playdates, birthday parties, and slam-dunk contests.