



## **Front Studio completes 4,600 s/f project with MKA Holdings, Inc.**

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Front Studio, a leading architectural and design firm based in New York City, recently completed work with MKA Holdings, Inc., on a three-unit, approximately 4,600 s/f traditional townhouse at 517 West 152nd St. The project consisted of a full reconfiguration of the property to create two generously sized rental units and a bigger space for the owner's personal apartment on the parlor level.

After purchasing 517 West 152nd St., Tomoko Matsuyama -- the owner and president of MKA Holdings, Inc., a development company with properties in New York and Japan -- retained the help of Front Studio, a two-person, Asian women-owned architectural partnership, because of the partner's international reach. Yen Ha, a Vietnamese refugee, is fluent in French, Vietnamese and English, and Michi Yanagishita, who was raised in Japan, Europe and the United States, is fluent in Japanese and English. Matsuyama preferred to speak with her designers in her native language, and valued their understanding of Japanese culture.

Directing most of their efforts to the upper three floors, Front Studio created interlocking duplex units that maintained the traditional and graciously proportioned parlor level rooms, allowing for an integrated series of living quarters. What were originally three equally sized apartments became two rental units - one is 1,000 s/f, the other is 1,300 s/f, and a 1,500 s/f home for the owner.

A modern stucco clad addition, containing a kitchen and staircase, was built at the rear of the town house. This new addition broke through the existing brick facade, creating a dramatic sky-lit passage. The simply framed wooden staircase leads to a wood portal that opens into the master suite.

"The project was about 'portals' between the new and old," said Yanagishita. "So the thresholds between the old part and the new addition is celebrated."

With the intent to not interfere with the property's already traditional and graciously proportioned rooms, the basement unit remains untouched. "We didn't want to compromise any element of the traditional layout the building has," said Ha. "Instead we wanted to bring in more light, and add a sense of airiness to the property."

Front Studio discarded as little as possible during the reconfiguration, reusing removed existing cabinetry in other locations and incorporating sustainable materials whenever possible. The two-phased renovation and expansion was completed in 8 months.