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Home Improvement

Three Manhattan interior designers combine budget-breaking furnishings with your basic Ikea shelving. It’s called style. Take notes.

WHEN STEVEN GAMBREL SPOUTS ABOUT COMPLEX NEUTRALS AND TEXTURED LAYERING, IT’S BEST FOR clients to just smile and nod their heads. You may have trouble grasping what he’s saying, but you can trust his eye. “The end result may not have been what a client was originally thinking,” says Gambrel, “but it’s always representative of their personality.” Gambrel, 33, honed his signature aesthetic—neat and studied like a Savile Row suit but with enough modern pieces and found objects to keep the fuss factor low—during five years at blue-chip architecture-design firms around Manhattan. After a few freelance gigs he went solo, turning his SoHo loft into HQ for SR Gambrel. His reputation is imposing enough to convince your wife to butch up the boudoir with his masculine Fiat chair. (Gambrel designed the piece to feel like the cockpit of a roadster.) But even he admits his powers of persuasion have their limits. One client wanted to put a flat-screen in the bedroom but his wife bristled at the idea. “She’s a psychology student,” explains Gambrel. “And they’re newlyweds. Apparently, a TV in the bedroom is a bad idea. We wired for cable, though, just in case.”

In the bedroom, this white box looks as cozy as a college dorm room. Designer Steven Gambrel warms up the space with grass-cloth wallpaper and a plush wool carpet. The upholstered headboard may seem slightly effete, but according to Gambrel, “it breaks down the echo near the wall,” which comes in handy when you’re entertaining.