



Vicky Colombet in *Town & Country*
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Starting All Over



Once **Karen** and **Richard LeFrak** settled into their new house—just six short Manhattan blocks away from their old apartment—they realized they'd made a move of life-changing proportions. *By Julie V. Iovine*

"I just knew I was home," Karen says of the moment she first entered the foyer of her new town house (opposite). She curls up with Mikimoto and Gem, her retired champion standard poodles, in front of Vicky Colombet's painting *Wind & Snow*.



FIRST THERE COMES the clattering rat-a-tat of perfectly clipped nails on the limestone floor of the foyer. This is followed by two hurtling puffs of white coming to an instant halt at the side of their mistress as she swings open the door. Being greeted at home by Karen LeFrak and two of her show poodles is a more animated event than one expects to encounter at a stately Upper East Side town house. But it is exactly that spirit of exuberance and discipline that characterizes Karen and Richard LeFrak's current life just off Fifth Avenue—a new chapter, as Karen is quick to offer, resulting from the couple's first change of Manhattan address in thirty-six years of marriage.

The LeFrak personal history has an old-fashioned, very New York ring: he was seventeen and headed for Amherst College and she was fifteen when they met at a winter dance. "Our parents were friends, and his father and Richard had to talk to me," says Karen. "All I remember is that he was tall, blond and smart"—and that he liked her sleeveless white moussair dress with pastel ribbons at the neck. They dated for seven years before getting married and soon moved into the same building as his parents. What else do you do when you marry into a family-owned real-estate dynasty? Then, as now, the LeFrak Organization was one of the largest private real-estate development and management companies in the country.

Flash forward thirty-four years to the couple, now with two grown children, Harry and Jamie, who both work in the family business. Karen is active in a wide range of philanthropies, from the Women's Committee of the Central Park Conservancy to the New York Philharmonic. She has become well-known for breeding standard poodles and taking home awards from the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show; she also escorts her dogs to hospitals for therapy visits with patients. Richard now heads the real-estate company that was founded by his grandfather, Harry LeFrak, in 1901. He also pursues avid interests in contemporary art and architectural history while

In the living room, interior designers Mary Foley and Michael Cox created a calm center for conversation. Karen's favorite eclecticism bloom shop a custom coffee table surrounded sofas were made by DeAngelis in the style of Jean-Michel Frank and covered in Holly Hunt's cotton velvet in Dove. The Westman-style chandelier is from John Salibello Antiques.



serving on several boards, including those of the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation and the American Museum of Natural History. On a smaller and more personal scale, the couple has endowed a fund to preserve the statue of Balto, the heroic sled dog, which stands astride a rocky ledge in Central Park.

In spite of their many social obligations, the LeFraks have always been homebodies at heart. "Richard is a very close-knit family, and I loved the feeling of safety," says Karen of those years spent living one flight below her in law, in a poster apartment on Fifth Avenue with a terrace overlooking Central Park. The Parish-Hadley decor was classic Manhattan taste of a certain stripe: a sophisticated country style that Karen refers to simply as "daisies and baskets with some English antiques." In fact, Karen liked it so much that she stalled for more than a year when her husband suggested they think about moving. "I really did not want to move, and I came up with these lame excuses. Like 'What do we do if we run out of milk late at night?'" she recalls. But Richard truly felt the need for a change after his father's death, in 2000. "So I went around with all these real-estate people, pretending to look," Karen says.

The formal dining room (left) has its playful side, too. Thanks to a wall of Picasso, both ceramics and works on paper. Custom hand-painted chairs surround a dining table from New York City's Wyeth in the master bedroom (above), shonized furnishings enliven a palette of white and cream.

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The search was desultory at best, she now confesses, until she entered one particular town house. "The moment I saw the foyer, I knew," she explains, sitting on the living-room sofa with Mikimoto, one of the dogs, curled around her back, his muzzle tucked neatly under her thigh. "It was so serene and spacious and bright—just how I was home." The landmark neo-Georgian town house, built around 1875, had been completely renovated by Foley & Cox Interiors of New York for the previous owners, a young family that had barely moved in before putting it up for sale in the aftermath of a divorce. As far as the LeFraks were concerned, the five-story dwelling didn't need a thing. And, best of all, it was a mere six blocks from their old home and offered a view of Central Park, if only a sliver, from one upstairs terrace.

They decided they wanted the house—and the talent behind the renovation, as well. Mary Foley and Michael Cox are both graduates of that inimitable school of ivy-league glamour known as Polo Ralph Lauren, where they met while designing private residences in addition to corporate interiors for the Ralph Lauren Home division. "We have a philosophy of appropriateness," says Cox. "We believe in architectural integrity but also in updating classical vocabularies to suit real living today." "We're not design Nazis," adds Foley. "In their renovation for the family that had preceded the LeFraks, they'd treated the town house not slavishly but with respect. They'd known how to tweak it in subtle ways, by superimposing the dentil moldings on the second floor, for instance, and switching out the carved-wood balusters of the

first flight of stairs in favor of nickel-plated bronze in front of commuted steel, touches that would give the house a modern twist. The recent black-and-white design includes a cobble ring, a safe slipcovered sofa, and a cowhide rug, all of which Fraks admired it so much—especially the subdued color scheme of white and cream—that they hired Foley from Ralph Lauren Home.