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DAILY NEWS

Hooking up in style



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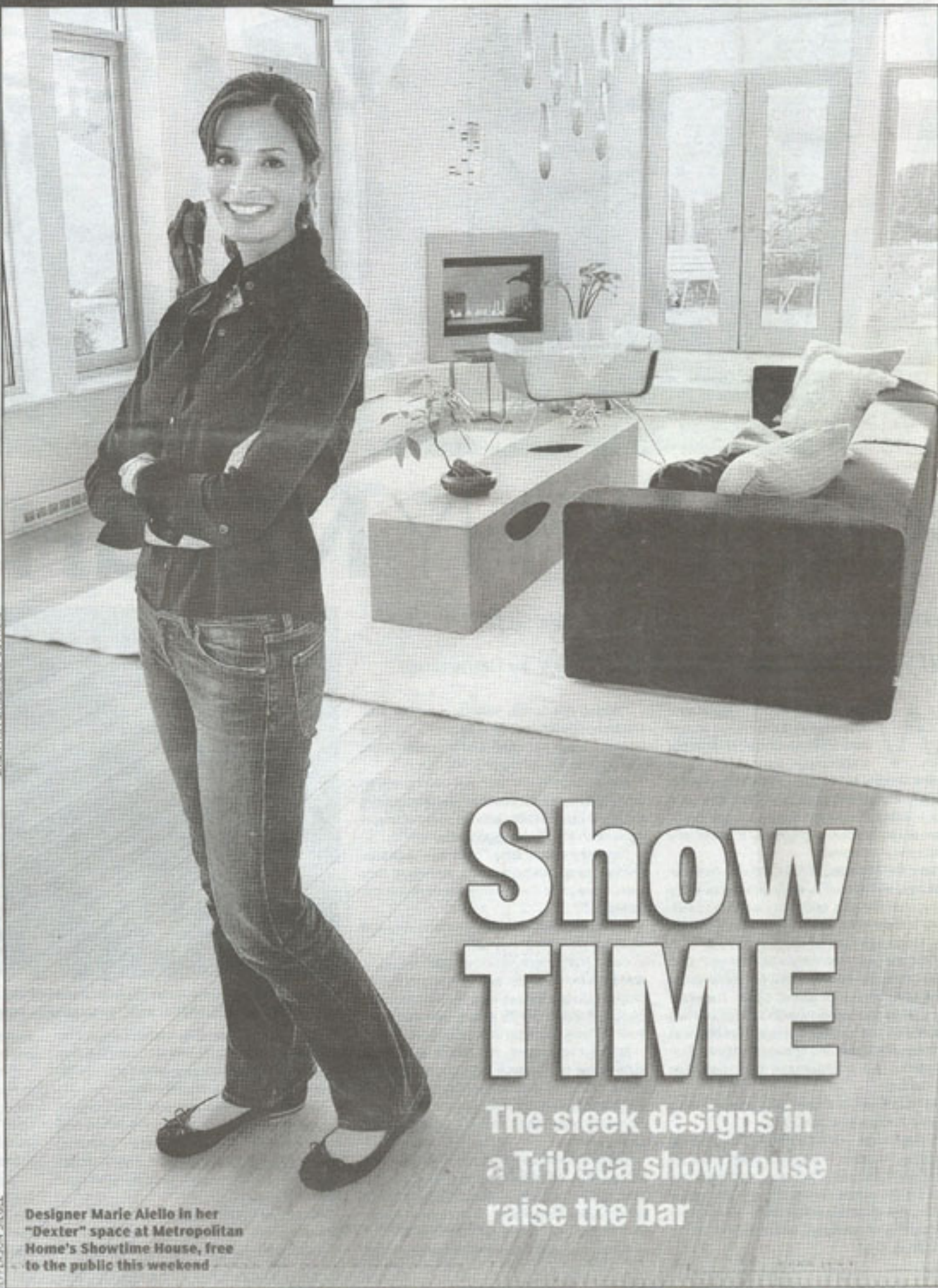
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RICHARD CORRIE/UNITED NEWS

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JEFFERSON SEIGEL

Designer Marie Aiello in her "Dexter" space at Metropolitan Home's Showtime House, free to the public this weekend

Show TIME

The sleek designs in a Tribeca showhouse raise the bar

SHOW OFF



By Jason Sheftell
Daily News
Real Estate
Correspondent

Maybe it's the recession or fear of risk, but the design world has been about as thrilling as smog lately. No recent furniture fair or design house showed groundbreaking innovation, as cluttered rooms and throwbacks like animal-skin rugs and neon-colored Andy Warhols dominated floor and wall space. No new superstars to go gaga over. Nothing we haven't seen before.

That's why I didn't want to like Metropolitan Home's Showtime House, held in two duplex penthouses at the Tribeca Summit condominium on Greenwich St. valued at \$22 million. I expected more half-baked work from designers too busy to dress up a room.

Plus, the house wasn't even in a house. It was in an apartment in a condominium with an elevator. The line to get in was around the corner, as guests crowded into a single lift. I was as jaded as the industry.

That changed the second the door opened.

Like a curtain going up on a Broadway show, the apartment came alive and I felt like a little boy visiting the house of his richest friend. For people with money in a city, this is how to live—big, bold art, custom-made furnishings and clean lines.

In an entryway by former fashion stylist Kara Mann, a large color photograph of a woman's face by Marilyn Minter with pink floral petals covering the lips fronted a hanging rattan chaise draped in a sheepskin throw. Black wallpaper and small sculptures of hearts with wings meshed with a dangling chandelier made from thousands of faux pearls. Shocking yet livable, this space made me want to see more.

Down the hall, custom-made gray wallpaper that appeared to be just wallpaper was actually made from blownup photos of human bodies wrapped in cellophane. That led to a \$500,000 Traxon screen of flashing LED lights in the shape of a blinking eye that complemented art made from real fingerprints taken by the artist.

PHOTOS BY JEFFERSON SIEGEL



Tribeca showhouse raises the bar on design (and it's free this weekend)



"United States of Tara's" second floor, designed by Francine Gardner

Outside on the 6,000 square feet of terrace, huge Sunscapes sail screens surrounded by wooden benches and trees hung in the air like prehistoric birds against the southern Manhattan skyline. In the living room, a concrete bench with holes in it was filled with black Swarovski crystals.

Chairs costing \$299 made from white seat belts surrounded a mahogany dining room table with a gash in it. A glass-tiled fireplace was configured with white and silver pieces shaped like a stream of DNA.

"This is insane," whispered a wide-eyed woman to her friend as she walked through.

And that was just New York designer Marie Aiello's "Dexter" area.

Now in its second year, the theme of the house is that designers, architects and landscape architects are told to match rooms to specific Showtime series: "Dexter," "Nurse Jackie," "Californication," "United States of Tara," "The Tudors" and "Weeds." The idea is to let designers go but stay focused by the show's provocative characters — a blood-splatter expert/serial killer, pill-popping nurse, sex-addicted author, schizophrenic mom and pot-dealing divorcee.

"The biggest difference this year was that the majority of designers have not done showhouses before," said Samantha Nestor, special projects editor for Metropolitan Home. For the second year in a row, she found the house, helped select designers and managed the installation process that included over 100 companies. "A glass box in the sky was the vision for this year's show. We wanted nothing old and stuffy. There are so many exciting things happening with design today — fabrics, textiles, wallpapers — but a lot is done only for private clients. We want people to see knockout moments."

Putting together a showhouse is never as easy as it looks. Nestor began hunting for the location of this year's house last November. She

began crafting the list of designers in December and, for the first time, introduced them to each other, making them present ideas in a round-table setting.

"I wanted them to know what each other was doing," says Nestor, the author of "Living With Wine," an upcoming book on the top residential wine cellars in American homes. "I think it inspired them. They knew this was the time for them to show what they could do. In this house, the only limit was their imagination."

Rooms were selected after designers gave their top five choices. Some, because of double picking, had to be selected out of a hat.

"I was terrified after I got 'Dexter,'" said Aiello, a former television producer and first-time showhouse participant. "Then I started getting into the character. Here, what you see is not what it seems. Dexter is not good or bad, he is not black or white. So I went with grays. Lots of thing in here are broken. Take the concrete bench. It is vulgar to have this as your coffee table, but if you look closely, it has

holes in it filled with beautiful crystals." After room designs were finalized, installation began in mid-August. Over 350 craftsmen, laborers, artists, carpenters, and wallpaper layers began putting the house in order.

Francine Gardner, who runs a design business out of her Franklin St. store, Interieurs, was brought to tears, then laughter, by the pace. In rhythm with a show about a schizophrenic mother of two played by recent Emmy-winner Toni Collette, Gardner changed the wall color in her "United States of Tara" room two days before the house opened last week.

Doing her first showhouse, she was anxious what the public would think of her duplex space that included a cubbyhole of a room designed in all black, including the wallpaper, custom-made circle canopy bed and laser-cut curtains.

"Black is soothing," said the Bordeaux-born

'A glass box in the sky was the vision'



The "Californication" bedroom by Markus Dochantschi



Samantha Nestor on "The Tudors" Terrace by Piero Lissoni

New Yorker who counts Julia Roberts as a client and loves metal furniture. "This is a meditation room. It's where the character, or any of us, can come to curl up. We all need a room like this."

Upstairs in a space marking Collette's teenage nymph persona, Gardner used pink carpet lettering and floor-to-ceiling strings of Swarovski crystals donated from a Beyoncé stage set to create the shimmering waterfall of the mind. Swarovski is a partner in the house; like Benjamin Moore, Kraft-Maid, Nemo Tile, Caesarstone, Sub Zero, Miele and Trove, a wallpaper company. Swarovski donated its products and services to the house for free.

Just as designers use showhouses to demonstrate skills, design companies do the same.

"This is as much a product-generated industry as designer industry," said Christie Boyle, vice president of brand development for Metropolitan Home and Elle Decor. "This gives companies the chance to expose real-world ideas and applications to thousands of regular people."

It's also a time for designers to show off relationships with local artists and artisans. Italian

product designer Piero Lissoni's outdoor terrace uses pillows by New York-based French artist Sylvie Guieysse. Gardner designed metal entryways of silhouetted facial profiles working with a local steel-sculpting company called Almueal. The fingerprint art in the "Dexter" room is by Brooklyn artist Jane D'Arensborg, whom Aiello met at the Museum of Art & Design where the artist was in residence and gathering fingerprint samples.

Not wanting to waste an opportunity, Aiello put her heart and soul into the room.

"We had to put all our clients on hold for this," said the designer, who lost 5 pounds in the process. "No one knows my name yet. The entire time I was thinking, what if we whiffed? I would have been embarrassed and never asked back. That's a huge deal. We had to give it all we had."

Located at 415 Greenwich St., Metropolitan Home's Showtime House is free tomorrow and this Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The house is open on weekends through Oct. 18 with a \$20 entrance fee going to New York City Housing Works.

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