

# ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

RECORD  
HOUSES  
2016



## In the Loop

A spiraling staircase is the centerpiece of the new Barney's Chelsea.

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**"THE IDEA** for a circular stair was in the air since the beginning," explains Steven Harris, architect of the newly opened Barney's flagship in downtown New York. The dazzling staircase French designer Andrée Putman created over 30 years ago for the specialty retailer's original store in the same Chelsea location lingers in the memories of its well-heeled patrons, and is still extant in the neighboring Rubin Museum of Art, which took over a corner of the store after Barney's left in 1997.

This design, also a showstopper but without Putman's delicate metal railings, marries beauty and brawn. Inspired by the spiraling stairs of Oscar Niemeyer and Luigi Moretti, Harris unfurls his suspended structure like a white party ribbon spanning four stories as it fills the glass-walled central atrium. Says Harris, "This was the largest void we could create without removing any columns." Those are irregularly spaced to dodge plumbing in this former residential building, which also features short floor-to-floor heights. "The great virtue of the low ceilings is that the stair didn't require landings."

The glass surrounding the stair—on upper floors full height, on lower ones acting as a handrail with a skirt above for a smoke baffle—features two layers of glazing with an interlayer of acrylic. A series of lines silkscreened on the panels—some mirrored, some matte gray—is reminiscent of the work of Agnes Martin and Sol LeWitt. "I wanted that element to be distinct but still allow shoppers to see across it," says Harris. "The space needed to be coherent."

Equally important, however, is the sense of spectacle about the stair—a stylish vehicle for seeing and being seen. "After all," Harris adds, "stores are very social spaces." ■

A self-supporting steel undercarriage, covered in fiberglass and then plastered, forms the curves of the suspended stairwell. A sculpted alcove with recessed lighting along its sinuous run defines the handrails. Stair treads and risers are sheathed in white marble.

