

INTERIOR DESIGN

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IT'S A TRUE story, but it reads like a fairy tale, happily-ever-after ending and all. In 1985, New York fashion designer Amsale Aberra was poring over bridal magazines in search of a simple dress for her upcoming wedding. "But the 1980s were ridiculously tacky," Aberra declares. "People were dressing with excessive ruffles and ornamentation." Fed up, she put aside everything she had seen in the glossy pages and designed her own dress for the big day.

The honeymoon continued. After her wedding experience, Aberra left Harvé Bernard, where she'd been working in ready-to-wear and sportswear, and committed to filling the void in the bridal-fashion market. She enlisted a small staff and started to produce dresses in her loft apartment on the fringes of the Garment District. By 1996, she was ready to open a boutique, Amsale, in 1,200 square feet of a Madison Avenue building's mezzanine.

Years went by, and Aberra's wedding and evening dresses adorned scores of minimalist celebrities, including Julia Roberts and Halle Berry, both on and off the set. When 2,300 square feet adjacent to the boutique became available, Aberra signed a lease and called on Steve E. Blatz, an architect, and Charles Frew, an interior designer.

Despite her uptown location, Aberra says that she didn't have "blond wood and a marble floor" in mind. An "edgy-industrial downtown feel" was also out. So Blatz and Frew responded with a serene environment that intertwines the rough and the pristine. To play off the white walls and dark →

Above, right: The display of bridal gowns conceals fitting rooms behind.

Right: Reminiscent of a veil, a wire-and-mirror sculpture by Shari Mendelson drapes the reception area.



Forever Modern

"Elegant" exchanges vows with "elemental" at a New York bridal boutique by architect Steve E. Blatz and interior designer Charles Frew

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mahogany floor, for instance, the designers chose gray-tinted precast concrete for the reception desk; the material resurfaces on low concrete slabs that Frew designed for display islands and seating groups. Hanging at the rear of the space is an abstract veil of nickel-silver wire, mirrored acrylic, and cellophane tape, by sculptor Shari Mendelson. Near the oversize mirrors, discreet touches of softness take the form of wheat-colored rugs. The rugs also help protect the wedding dresses from dirt.

When not being tried on, the dresses are suspended from ceiling-mounted, brushed-stainless-steel bars to form an elevated procession down one side of the boutique. Below the dresses is a free-floating platform of lacquered plywood that Aberra can remove for shows and parties. The wall behind the

dresses might not look notable at first, but it actually conceals the fitting rooms. No extraneous hardware draws attention to the three ceiling-height doors, which open inward with a gentle push.

For these fitting rooms, Aberra requested practicality, privacy, and comfort, not “some claustrophobic box that brides-to-be can’t wait to come out of.” And the mothers and friends typically shopping with future brides needed to be considered, too. Sized to hold customer-chaperone entourages with ease, fitting rooms are furnished with leather-upholstered lounge chairs, neutral-toned wall-to-wall carpet, and—as in the boutique proper—oversize mirrors. The webbed stools are by Vicente Wolf, who coincidentally lives in the loft apartment next door to Aberra’s.

—Sheila Kim

Left: At 110 square feet, fitting rooms comfortably accommodate the bride-to-be as well as relatives or friends.

Right: Wool rugs soften the mahogany floor. The chairs are linen-upholstered.

PROJECT TEAM (STEVE E. BLATZ ARCHITECT): CAMILO CERRO.
CHAIRS: ARTISTIC FRAME. WEBBED STOOLS: VW HOME. CARPET: STARK CARPET. LIGHTING CONSULTANT: JOHNSON SCHWINGHAMMER LIGHTING CONSULTANTS. MECHANICAL ENGINEER: AVCON DESIGN GROUP. GENERAL CONTRACTOR: RICHTER + RATNER CONTRACTING CORPORATION.