

An Airy Refuge From a Jam-Packed Store

By FRED A. BERNSTEIN

TWO years ago, Ricky Kenig, a divorced father of three, found himself paying \$7,200 a month for an apartment in TriBeCa. The rent made him uncomfortable. "I'm not as rich as people think," said Mr. Kenig, the co-owner of 22 Ricky's stores in Manhattan, Miami and East Hampton.

So Mr. Kenig, 45, decided to look for a home in Brooklyn, where he now occupies a renovated town house on a leafy block in Park Slope. After an 18-month renovation, the house is gloriously light and airy. But the move was less successful financially than architecturally. "My expenses are double what they were before," he said.

Mr. Kenig, whose first name is on a New York institution — beauty products stores beloved by high school girls and movie stars alike, along with thousands more costume-seeking New Yorkers every Halloween — is not hurting for money. He drives his twin daughters, Max and Dylan, 13, to school in a Mercedes G55, and his house has enough flat-screen TVs for a small hotel. But, he said, he also has a lot of debt.

Mr. Kenig said he spent \$1.3 million for the 19-foot-wide town house, built in 1899, and about \$1 million to transform what had been three apartments into a minimalist crib, designed by James and Hayes Slade, the husband-and-wife owners of Slade Architecture in Manhattan. As a result, Mr. Kenig said, he owes hundreds of thousands of dollars to his younger brother, Todd, a partner in Ricky's. He also owes hundreds of thousands of dollars to his contractor, who he said has agreed to accept payments over four or five years.

But what Brooklyn has taken from him, it may pay back. He is so enamored of the borough, he said, that he has begun expanding the chain of Ricky's stores to Brooklyn.

Mr. Kenig is devoted to his children, the twins from his first marriage, Max and Dylan, who live with him, and M. Valentine, his 3-year-old daughter from his second marriage, who lives with her mother in Fort Greene. He organizes his days around chauffeuring the twins to and from middle



HOUSE PROUD

METALLICA

Mr. Kenig used magnets to hang photos in his stairwell, right. Kitchen doors and cabinets, far right, are perforated aluminum.



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school on East 15th Street in Manhattan.

In between drop-off and pick-up, he works at the office above the Ricky's store in SoHo. There, his activities have included choosing the right colors for bobby pins. "A third our customers are blond, but bobby pins were always black or bronze," said Mr. Kenig, who has a curious mind and a strong interest in personal appearance.

For a 40th birthday present to himself, he had his arms "sleeved" in tattoos. And, until recently, he collected sneakers; he owns hundreds of pairs, some worth thousands of dollars. "I stopped when I realized I'm past

40, and I'm online talking about sneakers with a bunch of 16-year-old boys," he said.

The house, too, reflects his various fixations. During a yearly trip to China, where many of his company's products are manufactured, he picked up more than 100 copper skulls (actually molds for mannequin heads) that were about to be discarded. Ninety-six of them grace his living room wall. Asked whether she would decorate the heads for Halloween, his daughter Dylan said, "They're scary enough already."

On the wall opposite the heads, a new stairway, designed by the Slades with solid oak treads cantilevered from a steel rail,

connects the main floor with the two upper levels. Alongside the stairs is a three-story wall of blackened metal, on which Mr. Kenig has used magnets to place thousands of family photographs.

The first-floor living room is focused on a single piece of furniture: a sofa as large as some apartments (On the Rocks, by Edra). In the back, the kitchen cabinets are made of one-eighth-inch-thick aluminum plate into which the Slades cut openings in shapes that suggest that the ma-

MULTIPLES Rows of mannequin heads, left, and sneakers reflect the fixations of Ricky Kenig of Ricky's, a beauty supply chain known for Halloween costumes.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALBERT VECKHA, STYLING BY THE NEW YORK TIMES

terial is curving. The same optical illusion graces metal shutters on the glass doors that open onto the porch and the verdant backyard.

The second floor is the domain of Max and Dylan, who have bedrooms at opposite ends and a TV room in the middle. With only sliding panels between the rooms, Max said, there is not enough privacy, but Mr. Kenig promised them they would have more room to spread out when the basement is finished.

The top floor is Ricky's bachelor pad, where a wall facing the stairs displays about 100 pairs of sneakers. "They are so central to Ricky's personality," said Hayes Slade, "that we thought it was important to show them as a collection, rather than tuck them away." Behind the wall is a walk-through closet, filled with piles of t-shirts and sweatshirts. If the rooms suggests a chic boutique, that's not coincidental. Ms. Slade said that many decisions she and her husband made were influenced by their client's enthusiasm for "the art of retailing."

Mr. Kenig said that stores are where he does research. "To know what a shopper wants, you have to be a shopper," he said. "It doesn't come from sitting in the office."

These days, he said, shopping for his daughters "gives me the same rush that I used to get shopping for myself." The girls don't expect couture. "They're happy when they buy four things

at Forever 21 for \$70," Mr. Kenig said. "I'm the one who pushes them to buy more clothes." He also picks their gadgets. Right now, the girls have identical BlackBerry Curves, on which they text him constantly. Even in the house, "when we're on different floors, we text each other," Mr. Kenig said.

Mr. Kenig grew up Rockland County, but he and Todd spent much of their time in New York City, where their father owned Love's, a discount drugstore chain. "He would send us out to buy up all the Excedrin and Pepto-Bismol we could find at Kmart," Ricky Kenig said, "and then he'd mark it up."

In 1989, after dropping out of college, he opened his first store, in competition with his father. Two years later, the father sold his shares in Love's and began working for Ricky's. The elder Mr. Kenig, now 70, runs the company's makeup division.

One frequent visitor to the house is Mr. Kenig's first wife, Vanessa Ward, who lives in Flatbush and works for Ricky's as an event planner. Having a house where it's fun for the girls and their friends to hang out is smart, she said. "This way, it's always know where the kids are."

Mr. Kenig agreed. "If we were living in a two-bedroom, at their age, they would be itching to get out," he said. Here, he said, "I can stay upstairs, and they can have the other three floors to themselves."



Mr. Kenig entertains his daughters, Max and Dylan, 13, and M. Valentine, 3. The front stoop, right, is largely glass.

