

# ROOM SERVICE

If the showroom for Rachel Cohen and Andres Modak's home-goods line, Snowe, looks an awful lot like an actual living room—that's because it is. Welcome to a new level of experiential shopping. **By Naomi Rougeau**

A couple of months ago, Rachel Cohen and Andres Modak threw a dinner party at their New York apartment to celebrate Cohen's birthday. The spread was what one would expect from a design-conscious, well-heeled, thirtysomething Manhattan couple: The 35 guests were served buffet-style at the dining table—a sleek ebony wood affair outfitted with chic, no-frills white serving platters and meticulously lined stacks of matching dinner plates. A friend came over beforehand to mix a special cocktail, which was doled out in on-trend stemless cocktail glasses. The only difference: The plates, the glasses, the napkins, and every fork and knife were all for sale.

Welcome to The Whitespace, a 1,500-square-foot loft in the city's Gramercy Park neighborhood that doubles as the couple's residence and as the brick-and-mortar arm of Snowe, the home-goods brand they founded in 2015. At The Whitespace, which opened earlier this year, customers can browse the offerings—home basics with a distinct, clean-lined sensibility—in situ. While customers are encouraged to “touch, sip, and shop,” rifling through cabinets isn't necessary—instead, every available Snowe product is on view, from dinnerware (perfectly placed on said dining-room table and seemingly ready to receive guests) to linens (carefully folded and stacked by size in the guest bath). Aside from the couple's bedroom and master bathroom, which are off-limits (they had to set *some* boundaries), pretty much everything else in the apartment is up for grabs—even stuff that's not Snowe brand. Should a customer be interested in, say, the midcentury-inspired bench from Edgewood Made that sits in the couple's living room, Modak and Cohen have a direct line to the retailer. Still, it's not quite a store—visits are by appointment only (you can sign up on the company's website), and it's not like there's space for a stockroom in the back, so everything is merely a sample. (Purchases are shipped to the customer the next day.)

It's not completely surprising Cohen and Modak, 35 and 33 respectively, decided to open their home in this unconventional way, since, in a sense, they were their own first customers. The couple met while pursuing their MBAs at Penn's Wharton School of Business (where they bonded over, among other things, a love for minimalist de-

sign); they came up with the concept for Snowe while shopping for their first New York apartment postgraduation—and finding themselves in that home-decor purgatory many young, upwardly mobile urbanites know all too well: craving something more upscale than Ikea but slightly more attainable than Design Within Reach. “Everything that spoke to us from a quality standpoint was so far beyond what we were willing to pay,” says Cohen, who handles the financial and operational elements of the business, while Modak focuses on the marketing and creative. (Snowe, in case it's not immediately obvious, was so named for the cool, pristine image it conjures.)

Calculating that they weren't alone in their decorating dilemma, the couple transitioned out of their day jobs (Cohen as an investment

banker for a hotel group; Modak as a retail-strategy consultant). “We said, ‘Let's do this. Let's make products of the highest quality that can be provided at an attainable price point. Let's actually streamline and simplify the process of shopping for the home, which is so rife with terrible experiences all the way through,’” Modak says. To that end, they set out on a two-year journey, scouring the globe for the best home-goods artisans—who would eventually become vendors and collaborators. At Snowe, you can find white Limoges porcelain from a 240-year-old Portuguese producer that has the timelessness of Grandma's set, but with a fuss-free design you'll actually use every day (five-piece table settings start at \$220); or cloudlike bath towels (also from Portugal) that are made with a special “air spin” technique so they won't weigh you down when wet (starting at \$8 each).

While the couple won't go too far into specifics about revenue,

“This is an experiment—a laboratory. It's an opportunity for us to learn as much about our customer as possible, to interact with them intimately,” Modak says.

they say they became profitable within the first year; have grown their staff to 10; and have support from several high-profile investors, including Chris Burch. For what it's worth, they seem to have hit upon a recipe that's worked very well in the fashion sector, where brands like Cuyana and Everlane have taken off in recent years by offering carefully constructed staples at direct-to-consumer prices. (What's more, as with Snowe, the goods are often brought to you not by designers, but by MBAs.)

Like those brands, brick-and-mortar came *after* e-tail—though Snowe is the only one headquartered in the founders' actual home. “We wanted to give customers a way to see the products,” Modak says. “You want to really feel this stuff.” After an eight-month search for a space with the ideal layout (something airy), Cohen and Modak gave their new apartment a few dark accent walls to provide a contrast to the products, then set up shop. Part of what makes the operation work is that the couple are fastidiously neat by nature—the kind of people whose home would be guest-ready all the time anyway. (There's nary a piece of mail out of place.) Modak also points to the fact that their bedroom and bathroom are off-limits. “That's the separation point, and that tends to make things pretty easy.”

Still, do they *ever* grow tired of having people filter through what is also their home? “People ask us that a lot,” Modak says. “We were working 24/7 anyway, so it actually doesn't feel that different. It's a closer commute.”



From far left: Modak and Cohen; the foyer with a mid-century bench the couple can help order for you; a tablescapes chez Snowe with one of the brand's candles



From left: The couple's dining table set with Snowe tableware; the main living area



Winnie Au (styled by Yashuo Simmons; hair by Juli Ananaya for R+Co; makeup by Tiffany Saxby for Chanel)