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A downtown loft blends
elegant design with
historic charm



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Loft Horizons

An elegant urban loft heralds an exciting renaissance in downtown dwelling spaces.

Text by Jan Senn > Photographs by Karen Melvin

It isn't everyday that a designer is presented with a 22-foot-high, raw brick and concrete space and asked to turn it into a warm, inviting, comfortable home. But that's the challenge interior designer Carol Belz encountered when her clients first showed her the downtown industrial loft



Above: A constantly changing play of light animates the great room. **Left:** Contrasting elements form an exciting composition in the dining area. **On the faux-painted wall, a work by Guatemalan photographer Luis Gonzalez Palma.**

they had recently purchased—a challenge Belz eagerly accepted. “It was a wonderful opportunity,” says Belz, who worked with architect Jerome Ryan to shape the space. “We could let our imaginations go anywhere.”

It was also a radical change from the traditional home she'd previously helped the same clients design. But change is precisely what the owners were looking for in making such a move. “We did it for the adventure of the thing,” say the owners, who are deeply committed to the revitalization of the downtown riverfront. “And the view.”

The spectacular view is about all that existed when the project began. “There were no interior walls, just rough openings for windows and a freight elevator going up along part of the outside brick wall,” Belz says. “But the minute I saw that beautiful, mellow old brick, I knew we needed to develop the color palette around it.”

Belz commissioned decorative painter Gordon Dunham to conceive a faux-painted finish for the interior walls that echoed the subtle colors of the existing brick. “He really captured it,” says Belz. “All the colors come alive on the wall—peach, mauve, maize, taupe, buff, straw—it's very rich.”

Adding to the warmth of the interior is the natural maple flooring used throughout the two-story space. “That was a major decision because the choice of flooring affects your emotional reaction to the space,” says Belz. “Wood seemed softer, warmer, more friendly than concrete—and the light wood tones are a good complement for the brick.”

The pale wood tones are repeated in the wood-slat-blind window treatments, the natural-finished maple kitchen cabinets, and all the custom-designed casework in the 3,000-square-foot space.

Once the major surface materials were chosen, Belz and her clients addressed the questions of how to handle exposed conduit boxes and other reminders of the loft's industrial heritage. “Some of the elements we left exposed and unpainted; others we incorporated into custom-designed cabinets,” says Belz. “Although this a highly detailed and ‘finished’ space, we tried to take a simple, natural approach to handling each element—even though we used very luxurious materials at times.”





As dusk falls, the warm, buff-colored brick and faux-painted walls of the great room create a glowing frame for the glittering city skyline. A richly patterned prayer rug, a family heirloom, anchors the conversation area.



Natural maple kitchen cabinets contrast with granite counters and stainless steel appliances. Counter stools by Christian Liagre.

This contrast between elegant and industrial is exploited to great effect in the loft. In the dining area, the soft curve of a Fortuny silk light fixture suspended from the ceiling is set off by the stark lines of an industrial steel staircase leading to the mezzanine level. In the master bedroom, Italian silk draperies hang in shimmering folds alongside raw brick walls. "I love things that form a counterpoint to each other," says Belz. "Those combinations are exciting to me."

Belz worked with the owners to incorporate traditional items from their previous home they especially valued and felt would work in the contemporary new space—such as the huge prayer rug from his family that enriches the great room and the stunning antique chest from her family that accents the dining area. But apart from a few important pieces, most of the couple's former possessions were either given away or put in storage until claimed by their grown children.

For the couple, this "cleaning house" was an exciting fresh start. "We were ready to let go of a lot of things, to return to a simpler existence,"

In the hallway, a photograph by Lynn Geesaman hangs between wrought iron sconces. A serene stainless-steel-and-concrete table anchors the grouping.





In the den across from the great room, glass doors allow in views and keep out sounds. Custom maple bookshelves and cabinetry by The Woodshop of Avon. Lighting system by lighting consultant Carol Chaffee.



Italian silk draperies fall in shimmering gold and silver folds against the raw brick exterior wall in the master bedroom. Raw silk coverlet and upholstery fabrics add to the luxurious textures.



A sculptural glass sink is the center of interest in the powder room. Harlequin-patterned wallpaper in deep cream and silver tones elegantly echoes the color scheme used throughout the loft.

say the owners. Adds Belz, "I don't think I've ever had clients who were so excited about a space and so much looking forward to it. They were fully engaged in this every step of the way. It was truly a collaborative effort."

A project of this quality wouldn't exist without mutual respect between client and designer. Says Belz, "There were times when the solutions weren't evident, and I just had to say, 'Trust me, this is what I really think will work.' And they'd say, 'You're the expert, let's go for it.' I so appreciated it."

That kind of trust works both ways. For example, when an important photographic work by Guatemalan photographer Luis Gonzalez Palma—which the owners had purchased for their collection from the Weinstein Gallery before construction even began—finally arrived on site to be hung, Belz had never seen it. Yet, says Belz, "I don't think it could have a more perfect setting than this loft. And that's how the space will continue to develop. With a 22-foot-high space, the owners will be able to collect some incredible artwork."

Although the loft is still a work in progress, its creation is a considerable accomplishment for all involved, and one to be celebrated. At a dinner party given by her clients soon after they moved into their new loft, Belz saw the space for the first time as a guest. "I'd imagined how beautiful it would be at night, but when I actually saw it I was taken aback," says Belz. "The candles were lit, the lights of the city were sparkling, and the walls were almost pulsating with life. The whole space had this incredible, magical glow; it just embraced me. I was very touched by how it all came together." ■