

LOFTS

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NEW DESIGNS FOR URBAN LIVING

Felicia Eisenberg Molnar

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GLOUCESTER MASSACHUSETTS

ROCKPORT
PUBLISHERS

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Rosenberg Residence and Studio by
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(top) Tribeca Loft by
Tow Studios.
photo: Bjorg Arnarsdottir.

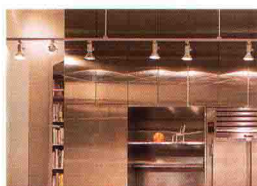
(bottom) Bay Loft by
Brayton Hughes Design Studio.
photo: John Sutton.

Manufactured in China.



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To Imre and Isabelle and the building of dreams.



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P R E F A C E

The birth of residential loft living is often dated to the late 1950s in the SoHo district of Manhattan. Affordable studio and living space for creative young urbanites was hard to find. Artists and craftspeople turned to abandoned factory buildings, whose generous scale offered relatively cheap, and often illegal, working-living studios. As the city fathers began to see the benefits of this reconversion, laws were adjusted to encourage redevelopment and soon, artists were joined by young professionals seeking an alternative to conventional city apartments. Trendy cafés, restaurants, and galleries took root and real estate values soared in these once-forgotten neighborhoods.

The appeal of loft living is instantly apparent. Lofts are romantic places. Banks of windows and towering ceilings speak of unusual heights, intense luminosity, open spaces, and personal freedom in cramped city environments. A loft offers a *tabula rasa* where the urban dweller can cast a wide net in seemingly endless space.

While lofts are full of exciting possibilities, knowing how to live in a loft and tackle the task of transformation may seem daunting. What to do with the lack of walls or hallways? What about sprinkler systems, windows that have no view or let in too much light, concrete floors stained with paint, and rumbling air conditioning and heating ducts overhead? How to handle open space that has not been delineated into bedroom, bath, and kitchen? To the untrained eye, crushed under the soaring magnitude of a former powerhouse or ice cream factory, a loft's almost inconceivable immensity may seem uninhabitable.

By understanding the options, however, one can start to savor the bigness and distinguish the openness. The impersonality vanishes and the dreaming can begin. Converting a leather tannery or former printing plant into a place to call home takes creativity and imagination.

This book is concerned with the unfolding of that dream. It offers inspiration—that clean contemporary lines really can float above an aging landscape. Offering a peek at how architects, interior designers and loft dwellers can weave a barren, formerly industrial space into a home—in the most wonderful sense of the word—is its mission.

This project grows out of many years spent peering into lofts in the cities around the world, at all times of the day and night, dreaming dreams of designing, living, and working in a loft. At some stage, savoring lofts and drinking them in visually is not enough; one wants to find out not just who designed them but who lives in them and what they do.

Loft dwellers seem to be the most fascinating of all urban dwellers. They are the heroes of our modern cities who have fought to rescue and preserve the city without destroying it, turning grand monuments of the past into grand residences of the future. Once-forgotten neighborhoods in many cities have been restored to some of the most exciting residences on the planet.

Today, New York's artists, designers, and other loft residents largely still hold the cutting edge in loft design. While the supply of building stock is diminishing, the original pioneering spirit to discover even more neglected neighborhoods in cities around the world continues. This book offers a rare glimpse at New York's influence, both subtle and obvious, on loft design internationally.

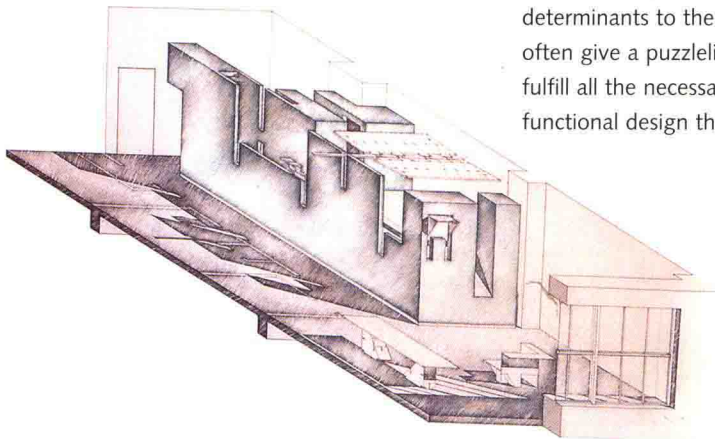
LOFT SPACE THE NEW URBAN DWELLING

by George Ranalli

There is much in loft design to theorize about. Issues such as family organization, multiple families in relation to each other, and the community of families at the scale of the city are open for investigation. In loft design, domestic arrangements are not predetermined. All levels of public and private human interaction are open for interpretation. Design for loft living is giving shape to new ideas about domestic life, which are in turn providing a substantive transformation in traditional residential design around the world.

Loft living has been primarily an American phenomenon but is becoming a sought-after dwelling type for urbanites in many cities around the world. Most often, neglected and rediscovered building stock offers spaces that are long and narrow, with windows either on two ends or along one long wall. Whatever the configuration, the found condition usually presents a strong beginning and, generally, a visible, bare-bones structure.

The challenge in working with loft space is to provide the necessary residential—and sometimes work—amenities, without sacrificing the open, light, and free-flowing quality of the original space. Each loft presents a new, different, and challenging spatial problem. Existing windows, elevators, and stairs are strong determinants to the organization of the loft design. These predetermined elements often give a puzzlelike quality to the problem at hand. The goal is ultimately to fulfill all the necessary light and space requirements and still create a compelling, functional design that preserves a relationship to the original building.



LEFT Axonometric drawing of the K-Loft designed by George Ranalli. The project was a 2,100-square-foot (195.1-square-meter) loft that integrated original brick walls of the former industrial building with a series of new forms and custom decorative objects.

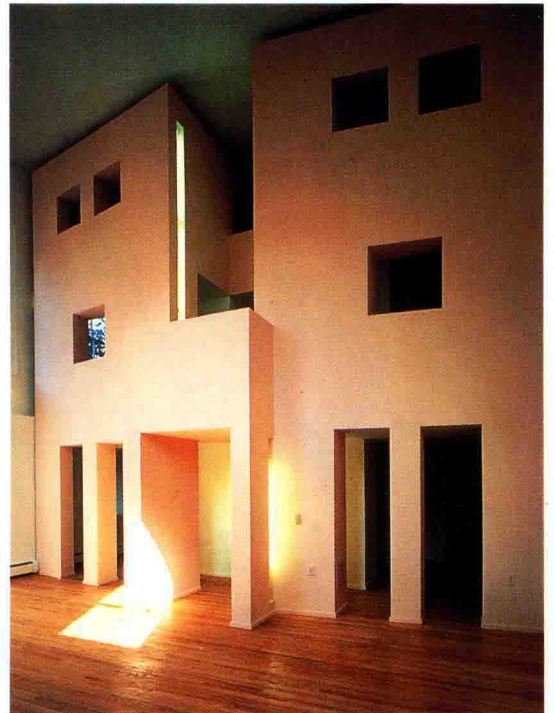
The archaeology of a loft space is often materially rich and somewhat rough in finish. As most lofts were once industrial spaces, the unfinished masonry provides a striking texture to the environment and provides designers and inhabitants with rooms of strong character and history.

In my own work on lofts, I always endeavor to explore the needs of public and personal family life to yield the possibility of new, untried domestic arrangements. We take for granted that the public realm is for family and group rituals while the private spaces of domestic life should allow individuals to dwell in their thoughts, feelings, and dreams. The specific alterations and interpretations of a wide-open loft space can produce some interesting spatial and familial arrangements and relationships that are not readily accommodated in conventional residential architecture. For example, the Peter Anders loft on page 118 was a study in new ways of living for two families sharing a single loft space. This necessitated novel solutions including common areas and connecting elements to bridge the private areas.

The exploration of materials and forms is also very dynamic in loft design. An intimate dialogue of these two elements can be experimented with in unusual ways. Detail, too, is the last and ultimately most important component of loft projects. Details reflect the complex technical and aesthetic idea and contribute to the overt beauty of the design, specifically through their form and proportion.

The seamless relationship of a new design for loft living to the existing condition of the building as a historical artifact is, finally, paramount. The search must always be for a coherent, clear, and sometimes innovative idea about domestic life that can be expressed in material beauty. This is the challenge of loft design that is highlighted in many of the projects featured on the pages that follow.

George Ranalli is professor of architectural design at Yale University, and maintains a private architecture practice in New York City. Mr. Ranalli's work has been exhibited internationally and is part of the permanent collection of twentieth century art and design at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He has been the subject of two monographs, and his work has been published widely around the world.



ABOVE Newport Residence, conversion of a National Register Historic Landmark schoolhouse into six loft units. The spaces are fronted with an interior façade behind which the smaller, more private rooms are arranged.

