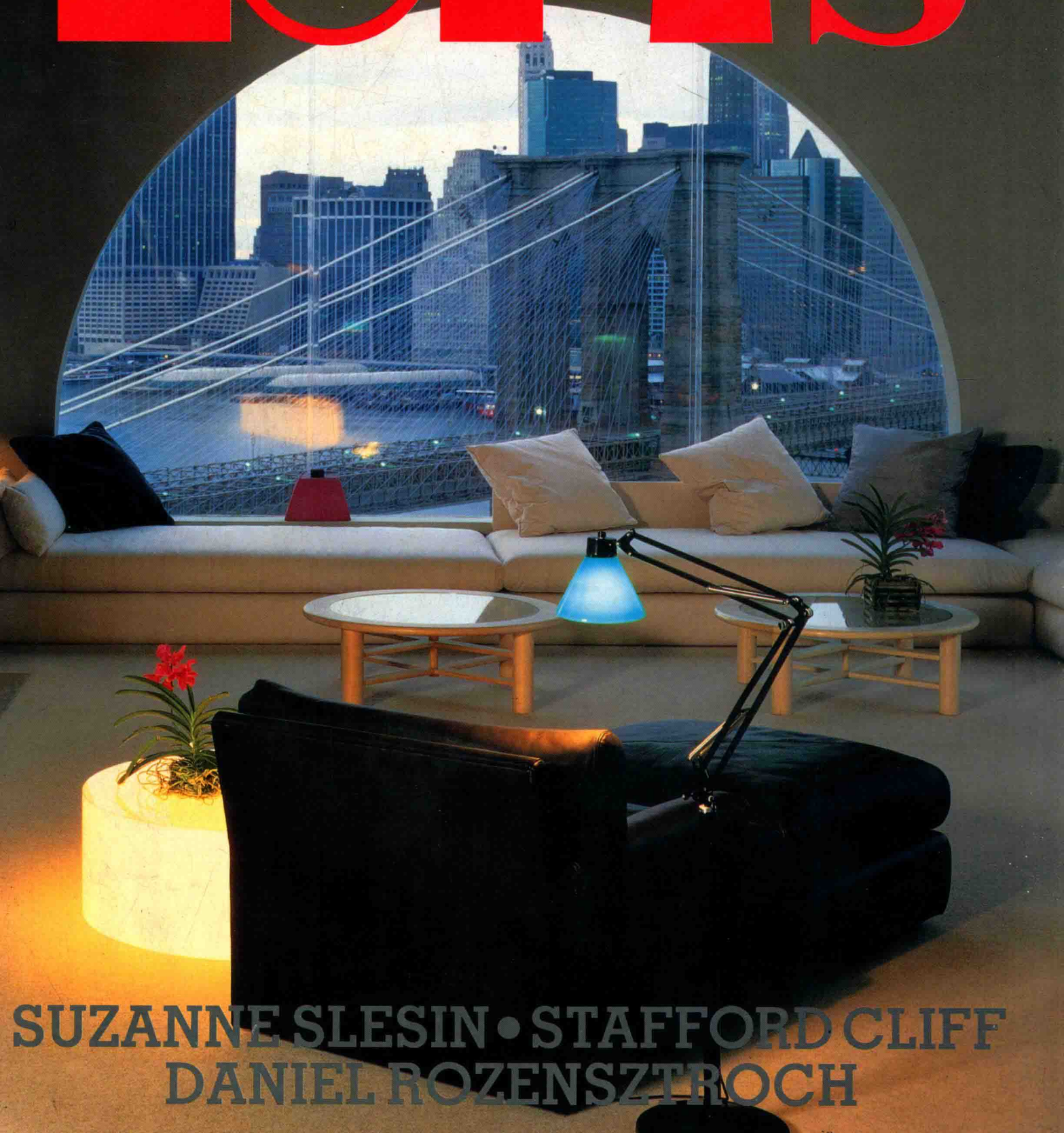


THE BOOK OF

LOFTS



SUZANNE SLESIN • STAFFORD CLIFF
DANIEL ROZENSZTROCH

THE BOOK OF
LOFTS

**SUZANNE SLESIN
STAFFORD CLIFF
DANIEL ROZENSZTROCH**

WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY GILLES DE CHABANEIX
AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROBIN MASON



THAMES AND HUDSON

DEDICATION

TO: JOACHIM BENO STEINBERG,
ANDREW CLIFF,
AND LAZARE ROZENSZTROCH

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About five years ago, Jane West, the late publisher of Clarkson N. Potter, suggested that it would be a good idea to put together a book on the development of lofts. Although it has taken us longer to go ahead with the project than we had expected, we are grateful to Jane for her prescient suggestion and hope that we have produced a book she would have been pleased with.

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Suzanne Slesin, New York
Stafford Cliff, London
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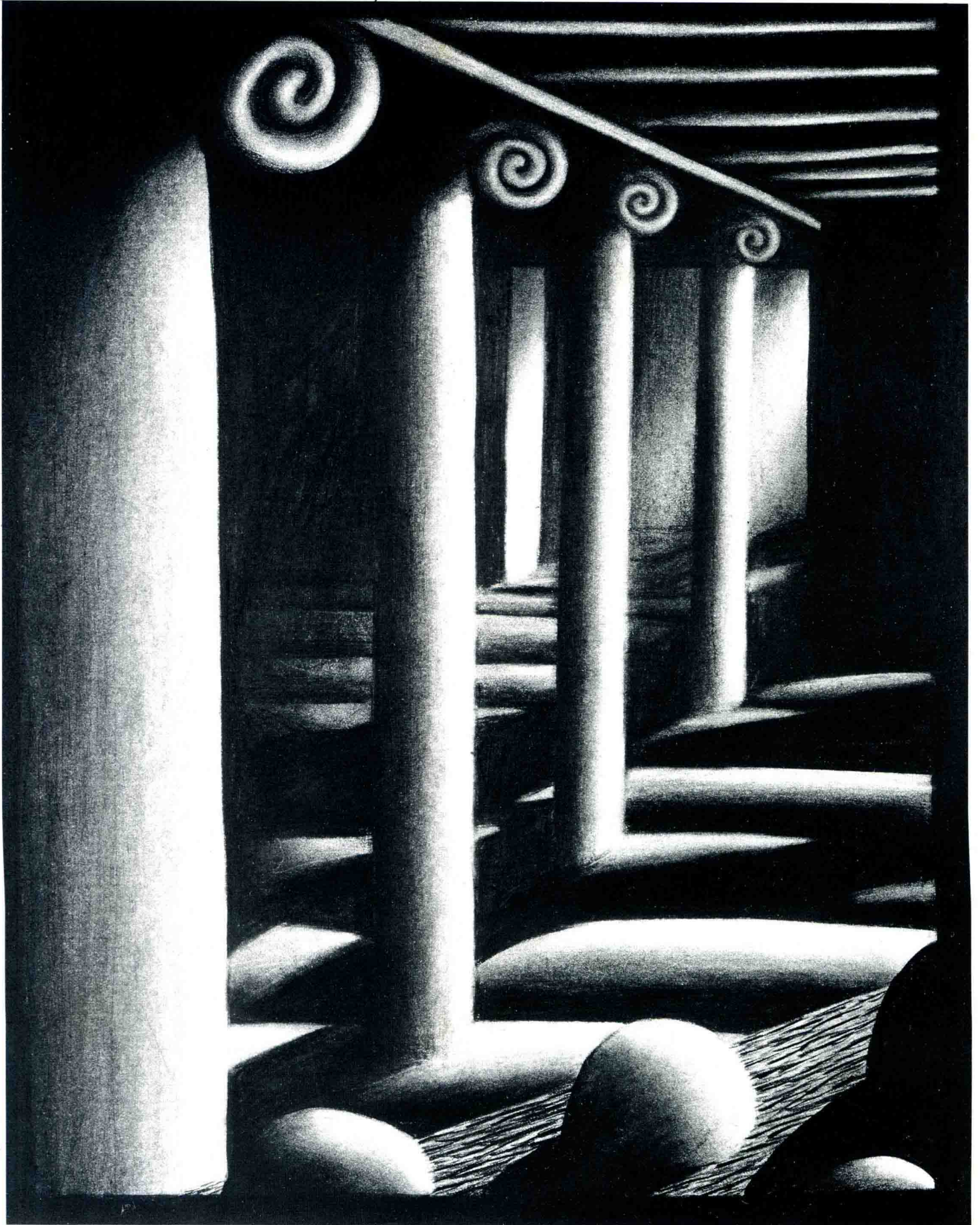
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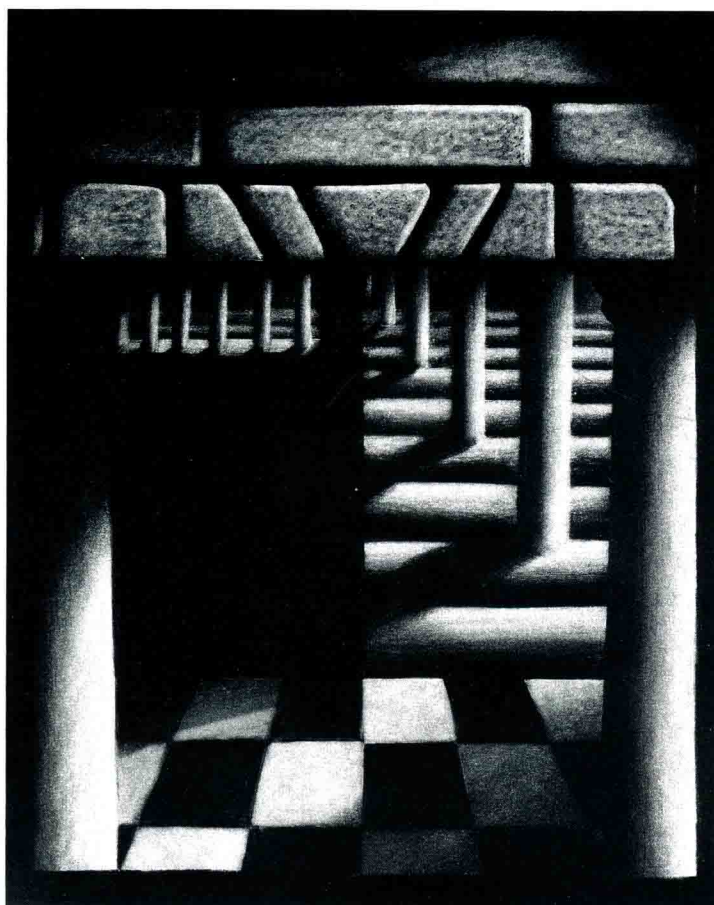
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INTRODUCTION

Loft living represents one of the major trends in urban redevelopment in the last 30 years. The conversion of warehouses and factories into middle-class residences has meant not only a change of direction in the migration to suburbia and a revival of city centers that have fallen into decay, but also, maybe more important, the growth of a new consciousness.

In recycling commercial spaces into viable residences, loft dwellers express a respect for the urban past. This attitude has been in contrast with the general practice of developers who until recently often preferred to tear down abandoned buildings and on their sites erect modern and more commercial structures. The lofts revolution has been part of a movement that fostered the recognition of a city's architectural heritage and the value in preserving it.

New York's cast-iron buildings, many of which date back to the mid-19th century and

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	viii
1. THE HISTORY OF LOFTS	3
2. LOFT ATMOSPHERE	23
3. THE LOFT STATEMENT	33
4. THE ARTIST'S LOFT	73
5. THE OPEN LOFT	97
6. THE DIVIDED LOFT	117
7. DIVIDING HORIZONTALLY	129
8. DIVIDING VERTICALLY	157
9. LIVING AND WORKING	175
10. THE LOFT IN DETAIL	207
11. THE LOFT INFLUENCE	213
12. PLANS AND ISOMETRICS	233
PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS	246
INDEX	247

are the work of James Bogardus; Paris's ornate glass-ceilinged "galleries"—the graceful grandparents of America's modern shopping malls; and London's dramatic stone and brick waterfront buildings are among the architectural types that have been rediscovered and reappreciated, and are being recycled into residential lofts.

The speed with which an area such as SoHo in New York has been gentrified tends to hide the early loft dwellers' long struggles. It has not been an easy route. Planning and zoning regulations have both protected and hindered progressive thinking. Many people lived and worked in sparse and uncomfortable lofts through years of illegality and harassment. It was not an uncommon experience for an artist who was living illegally as far as zoning regulations were concerned but with the consent of his landlord to find himself evicted after he had invested time, energy, and money in the renovation of his loft.

Early loft dwellers resorted to elaborate subterfuges in order to hide the fact that their loft spaces were being lived in—not simply used as studios. Beds were installed on pulleys that allowed them to be raised to the ceiling and hidden if a building or fire inspector came unexpectedly to call; groceries were not brought home in supermarket shopping bags; and residential garbage was frequently carried out of the neighborhood or hidden under artwork-related debris.

"Until the 1970s, living in a loft was considered neither chic nor comfortable Making a home in a factory district clearly contradicted the dominant middle-class ideas of 'home' and 'factory', as well as the separate environments of family and work on which these ideas were based," wrote Sharon Zukin in *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (Baltimore, Md., The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

More than any other element of lofts, it was probably their sheer physical space that ultimately overcame this resistance and gave birth to a new language of living in which homes were not described as a series of rooms,

but rather as a number of square feet.

In the early 1970s, the demand for loft living spread beyond the downtown neighborhoods to the more traditionally minded members of the middle class who wanted space and were attracted to the new way of life that the location and expansiveness of lofts promised. Loft newsletters, loft cooperative boards, loft legalization, and the support of lawyers and business men, city planners and architects—some of them recent loft residents—made the public and city officials aware of the potential and power of the new movement. Municipal authorities finally recognized the viability of loft living and forced changes in zoning laws that allowed for the occupancy of the former factories and warehouses.

The downtown loft scene evolved from its bohemian and remote early status to include boutique- and restaurant-lined streets and many mixed neighborhoods where traditional shops and new businesses can for a short while still exist side by side. In the process, the formal and preordained living patterns that have seemed to constrain people since the last century have been brought into question. Changing attitudes toward domestic life are reflected in these living spaces, which can easily accommodate home offices or work spaces and can remain open or be divided depending on the needs of the residents.

Lofts continue to offer an exciting alternative to urban apartments and a way for individuals to express their personal views through the places in which they live. The lively spirit that propelled the lofts movement has reached beyond commercial neighborhoods and can easily be seen in the planning and construction of new houses and apartments and the renovation of existing ones. The influence is apparent in the layouts and floor plans that are being devised, with fluid spaces and rooms that tend to be more open to one another than in the past.

No longer experimental or even trendy, loft living is a fully established and accepted lifestyle that is bound to have an important and enduring effect on residential design.



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THE HISTORY OF LOFTS

Some of the spaces considered the ancestors of lofts today are artists' ateliers – custom-built studios with large-paned north-facing windows, which flourished in Paris as early as the mid-19th century and in New York at the turn of the century. The execution of overscale academic and military paintings required expansive high-ceilinged studios, and traditionally, painters were located on the upper floors of the buildings, while sculptors, whose materials and finished pieces were heavier and more unwieldy, were usually found on the lower or ground floors.

But what we more readily think of as lofts today are spaces originally occupied by such crafts and industries as woodworking, printing, belt and tie manufacturing, and cardboard box making in buildings that have been converted into residences. In Paris, these include factories, in culs-de-sac, and in courtyards behind apartment buildings.

Light industry often occupied entire floors set up with dozens of workers at long tables. In New York, the printing and publishing industries as well as clothing companies, which ultimately moved from Lower Manhattan to the center of the garment industry, or rag trade, on Seventh Avenue, were some of the most important of early loft tenants.

New York City's large architectural firms, numbering about 600 at the turn of the century,

were also early tenants of loft buildings. The George B. Post firm, one of the most important in New York, was located on Union Square North, while many others were grouped along Broadway below 14th Street.

Loft buildings were concentrated, too, in areas of large cities that were near the docks and served for the storage and distribution of food stuffs. In Boston, New York's TriBeCa, and in both London's Covent Garden and Docklands areas, many loft buildings originally provided warehousing for cheese, spices, coffee, and tea.

The birth of residential loft living can clearly be ascribed to the SoHo area of Manhattan, where artists have occupied lofts since the late 1940s. It was the late 1950s, however, that saw the swift revitalization and the beginnings of gentrification of SoHo, the area between Houston and Canal Streets formerly known as Hell's Hundred Acres. The numerous fires and overcrowded conditions in this neighborhood had once been a prime target of the American Labor Movement.

Few loft dwellers today can ignore the irony of a single family living luxuriously in a 2,000-square-foot space that was in their parents' and grandparents' time the oppressive workplace of perhaps 200 people.

LEFT: Cast-iron structures are mingled with tenement buildings in Lower Manhattan about 1910.



TOP: Wooden shipping and storage barrels are stacked by New York's East River in an early 20th-century photograph of the Fulton Market. Originally a retail complex for the sale of meat and produce, the six blocks bounded by

Fulton, Dover, Water, and South streets gradually became an important wholesale outlet for fish—and in recent years a tourist attraction and a residential neighborhood as well.



ABOVE CENTER LEFT: Pushcarts and horse-drawn wagons made their daily deliveries and pickups on Worth Street in New York's wholesale district near City Hall in about 1890. Situated between Broadway and Church streets,



Worth Street was lined with an impressive row of cast-iron warehouse buildings, some built around 1869 by the architect Griffith Thomas. In the early 1960s, a large part of the block was destroyed and replaced by a parking lot.

ABOVE AND LEFT: Awnings protected pedestrians from the sun and tramways were important means of public transportation along Lower Broadway at the turn of the century.



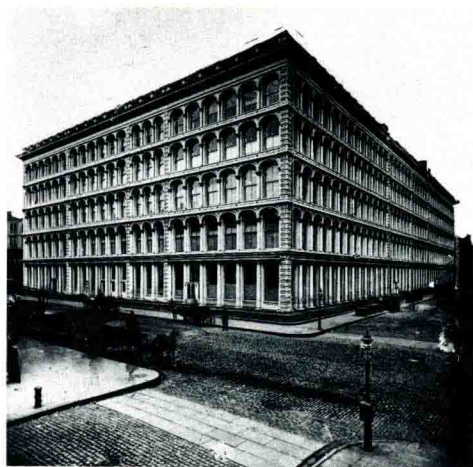
LEFT AND BELOW LEFT: Two French factory complexes at the turn of the century feature a series of low brick buildings with rounded window tops. Access was through a main gate and goods were transported on tramlike tracks. At left is a printing plant, the *Imprimerie Crête-La Cour* at Corbeil-Essones; the *Emaillerie Parisienne*, an enamel factory at Boulogne-Billancourt, near Paris, with workers posed near the main gate, is below left.

RIGHT: Huge metal strut walkways connected some of the warehouse buildings along London's Wapping High Street at the beginning of the century.

BELOW RIGHT: Built in 1884, by the Arbuckle Brothers, for the storage of green coffee beans, and shown in a 1936 photograph by Berenice Abbott, the warehouse was nestled under the Brooklyn Bridge. Now, the round-topped and shuttered openings have been filled in with glass and the structure, like many others in the neighborhood, has been converted into a loft dwelling.







ABOVE: A horse-drawn carriage stands in front of the A. T. Stewart store, which opened in 1859 on Broadway between Ninth and Tenth streets in New York City. The department store was considered to be one of the largest cast-iron structures ever built. On the exterior, glass windows were framed by a series of Corinthian columns. The interior was punctuated by cast-iron columns and wrought-iron beams, and the floors were laid out in circles around a rotunda topped by a glass skylight. A fire destroyed the wooden floors before the building was torn down in 1956.

RIGHT: An engraving depicts the A. T. Stewart sewing room in 1875. Although the store specialized in selling fabric for women to make clothing at home, it also sold garments hand-sewn by several hundred employees. The women worked at long tables in a large open space with cast-iron columns.

