

A Manhattan couple with grown children decided that a new chapter of their lives involved moving from a formal townhouse to a downtown loft. The family still gathers as it always did before.

LOFTY GOALS

INTERIOR DESIGN BY *Mark Cunningham*
ARCHITECTURE BY *Michael Gilmore*
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Opening pages: The main open-plan living area in a Greenwich Village loft is defined by its arched windows. The architect and interior designer fashioned a Modern fireplace in a windowed corner. A pair of French 1940s Guillerme and Chambron chairs are grouped with a vintage chair by Pierre Guariche. Opposite: A blackened steel and marble dining table designed by Mark Cunningham is topped with a branch-like chandelier designed by artisan David Wiseman. This page: A powder room is accented with bronze sconces and a bronze mirror frame.



The natural light that streams in through a wall of double-hung windows in the sitting room is regulated by Roman shades. A mid-century Modern coffee table is centered in front of a custom daybed, a popular destination for afternoon naps by family members.



Opposite: The master bedroom features an expansive sitting room, which is kept bright with bleached oak furnishings and transom windows through which natural light from adjacent rooms filters in. This page: A lighting fixture by Eric Schmitt is positioned above the custom master bed.



Even though the homeowners' children are grown, they come to visit often and sometimes stay the night. The "girls" bedroom is furnished with a pair of custom walnut beds. The lamps on the end tables are ceramic.

IT WAS SIMPLY a matter of Mark Cunningham being honest with his clients. When he walked into the Upper West Side neo-Classical townhouse owned by Pam and Kevin Wolf, soon to move to their new downtown loft apartment, he looked at all the furnishings that filled the six floors, and, according to Pam Wolf, “He chose a single lone bench to bring with us to the new apartment.”

In fairness, those formal furnishings just wouldn’t translate to a full-floor, open-plan loft in a former West Village typewriter factory. “My four children, all in their twenties and living with dorm-style furnishings in their apartments, quickly scooped all of the furniture from the townhouse,” says Wolf, “and they’re happy to have them.”

The homeowners, Cunningham, and architect Mike Gilmore agreed that the loft space, with its big arched windows from which there were expansive views of the Village, needed to be brought back to look like it once was. Yet, as Gilmore emphasizes, “We wanted to embrace the industrial aesthetic, but not necessarily in such a spare way. The clients wanted this to feel luxe and refined, though we left a bit of the old grit around the edges, as reminders. Everything was cleaned up, especially with the use of materials like polished steel and refined bronze.” All of the windows were replaced, though their original forms were replicated, in adherence to strict historic district guidelines. “This is the only floor in the old building that has arched windows,” says Gilmore, “and they really define this long, main living room, which takes an L shape.”

Cunningham, meanwhile, helped choose furniture that referenced not only vintage forms, but also contemporary ones. “We brought in furnishings from a lot of periods,” he says, “a blend of warm woods and a real mix of textures—leathers and velvet and linen and silk and sisal. Multiple textures add warmth to these rooms and create a deep layering, a technique important to my work.”

To further foster a sense of domestic intimacy and architectural variety in what was once an unadorned factory floor, Gilmore raised the floors leading into the bedrooms—not just for visual effect, but also for practical reasons, as it allowed for new pipes to be concealed. “Two short steps up into the apartment’s more private rooms make large open spaces become more intimate. It lowers the ceiling heights and, in turn, makes the public rooms feel grander.”

The ceilings, in fact, were one of the homeowners’ chief concerns. Pam Wolf recalls seeing the original cement ceilings and cement columns as being “not beautiful, and actually pretty horrible.” Gilmore and Cunningham addressed the problem by cladding the ceiling with thick hand-planed wood planks, then painting them white. Columns were wrapped with clean and elegant metal facings. Wolf, who admits to being “pretty particular about everything I live with,” was pleased with the results. However, both the architect and designer were not. “They felt the ceiling looked too flat, too brand new,” recounts Wolf. “What seemed perfect to me wasn’t for them.”

The designers decided to blast the ceiling planks with industrial-scale humidifiers until the boards warped a little. (Materials that are actually new assume the patina and form of something aged, as if original to the old building.) As for the decidedly unattractive ceiling pipes that needed to stay in place, the designers wrapped them in metal. Additional ceiling beams were added for visual effect and balance.

Configuring a room as large as the main living/dining area proved challenging. The resulting space features four distinct seating areas. For a couple who entertain a lot, both for pleasure and business (Wolf founded The Parlor of New York City, a highly popular beauty and wellness center), and who regularly still dine with their children, the seating plan works well. “The areas can easily sit up to ten people, both comfortably and socially,” says Wolf. So distinct, though, is each area in the long main room that Wolf and her family joke about their functions. For instance, after Cunningham positioned a backless leather settee in one sitting area, Wolf and her family began to refer to the piece as the apartment’s Therapy Room. “Anyone who sits there, must tell us all their problems,” she says with humor. “When someone has a bad day, that’s where they sit and can talk out their problems.” With windows on four sides and even interior spaces configured to receive natural light from transoms, the apartment is bright with life, from the outside and inside. As Gilmore adds, “Of all the places I’ve designed, this might be the one I’d most like to live in.” ■

Mark Cunningham managed to retain the industrial character of the loft building while infusing the interiors with warm colors and soft textures.

“We configured the apartment so that light penetrates every space.”

—Mark Cunningham

