

LOFT REDUX



When loft living is no longer
“roughing it” in the big city

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

TEXT JORGE S. ARANGO PHOTOGRAPHY RYAN MCDONALD
INTERIOR DESIGN DAN RAK



OPPOSITE: The family lounging area features a Modshop tufted sofa, mid-century look chairs and tables from Four Hands, and a Currey & Company chandelier. The Loloi rug picks up the curtains' wine color. ABOVE: The spectacular Lightology multi-pendant chandelier over the Sarreid dining table took a full day to hang. The floor's herringbone pattern distinguishes the space within the larger open plan.

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Loft living today is a far cry from its origins in the 1960s and '70s, when scrappy creative types illegally occupied former manufacturing spaces not zoned for residential living, and got by without heat and hot water. The renegade spirit of loft living, of course, introduced a new typology to our contemporary architectural lexicon that has become the benchmark of urban chic. What was adventurous back then has become mainstream, with buildings now designed to specifically mimic lofts. The sheer ubiquity of them has made it challenging for designers to find approaches to these spaces that feel fresh and new.

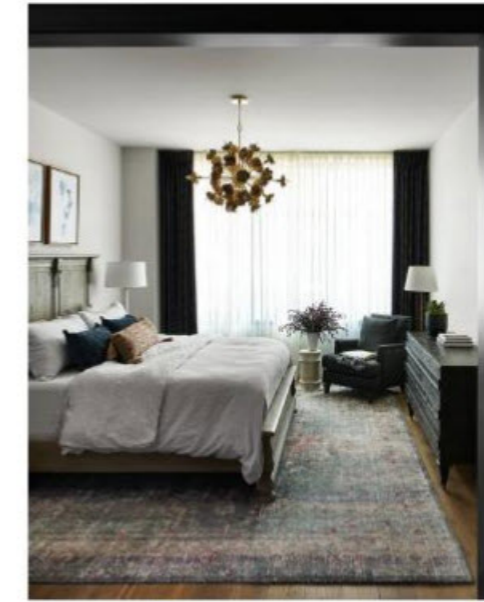
That was designer Dan Rak's task when a couple who he had worked with on other projects bought a 3,100-square-foot, three-bedroom apartment in Chicago's West Loop, a former industrial area that in recent years has become an uber hip foodie mecca. The loft typology was, of course, completely appropriate to this setting. "It has a lot more of an edge, so they wanted something consistent with the architecture of the neighborhood," says Rak of his clients – Ted, a 41-year-old dermatologist, and Chelsy, a 32-year-old physician assistant.

Circa Lighting pendants hang over a quartzite-topped island where Palecek's "Fritz" rope stools proffer casual seating. Back counters are swathed in zinc, while the hood is antiqued bronze. A subway tile wall, in keeping with the apartment's industrial references, breaks up black custom cabinetry by Bentwood Luxury Kitchens.





By the living room area window, a “Portuguese” desk from Noir and an antique gilded mirror bring in historical references that add to the general eclecticism of the furniture silhouettes.



RAK'S STRATEGY was, to a great extent, one of working against type. That meant introducing color, luxurious textures and softening elements like yard upon yard of curtains. “Without plenty of texture to make it feel homey,” believes Rak, “it would have felt cold.” This approach gave the spaces a more traditionally residential demeanor without negating industrial details, such as the apartment’s steel windows. Rak also included industrial references of his own (i.e., metal lighting fixtures in the dining and family lounging areas and, in the kitchen, an antiqued bronze hood set into a subway tile wall, as well as zinc countertops).

RAK'S PROGRAM, however, required some persuasion. “It took me a little while to come around to that much drapery and the boldness of the colors he chose,” admits Ted. Even Chelsy, who likes soft warm tones, was initially reticent about some of Rak’s choices. “Dan’s good at taking us farther than our comfort zone,” she says. “Like all the wallpaper! The patterns were more out there.”

To wit: The “Snowdrops” wallpaper from U.K.-based MissFit on either side of the living room fireplace, which, Rak explains, “Took an awkward sheet rock wall and treated it like a piece of art.” Ironically, this area in the open plan – made cozy with the wallcovering, bookshelves, comfortable seating of human (rather than oversized) proportions, and traditionally referenced furnishings like a gilt mirror and a vaguely Portuguese colonial desk – turns out to be Chelsy’s favorite spot.

Living, dining and family lounging regions are segregated within the wide-open main room in two ways: anchored on plush Loloï rugs that establish individual, yet interrelated, palettes for each; or by a variation in flooring (herringbone rather than straight planks in the dining space). Textures ramp up a sense of tactility that also warms the urban loft vibe: thick velvet on the curtains paired with linen sheers, family area sofa’s sage green velvet, grass cloth in the entry, kitchen barstools with rope backs, cerused wood on a master bedroom chest.

The opposite of raw and unfinished, one thing is certain: original loft dwellers would not recognize this hybridized evolution. Rak, however, dares them not to like it.

CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT: A Made Goods table by a brass-finish tub filler from Watermark in the master bath’s bathing niche. A Regina Andrew light fixture hangs over an RH bed, Uttermost chair and Brownstone’s cerused oak chest of drawers in the master bedroom. Outside the glass box of the dining room is a loggia appointed with RH furniture and a concrete table from Sunpan.

