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# LOFTY. Inspirations

A Houston couple achieves the streamlined home of their dreams thanks to the seamless joining of two lofts.





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Architecture by Robert Fowler, Zk Building Design  
Construction by Steve Hood Company



A swirl of art work, titled Hurricane, by Texas artist Paul Fleming overlooks the den. The entertainment center area is new to this space.

**Opening spread** A minimalist theme pervades this Houston loft in The Manhattan luxury building near the Galleria. The main living room carries views of the Williams Tower and sculpture fountain. Neutral furnishings from Roche Bobois and Ligne Roset combine with bold art for a streamlined, less-is-more look.



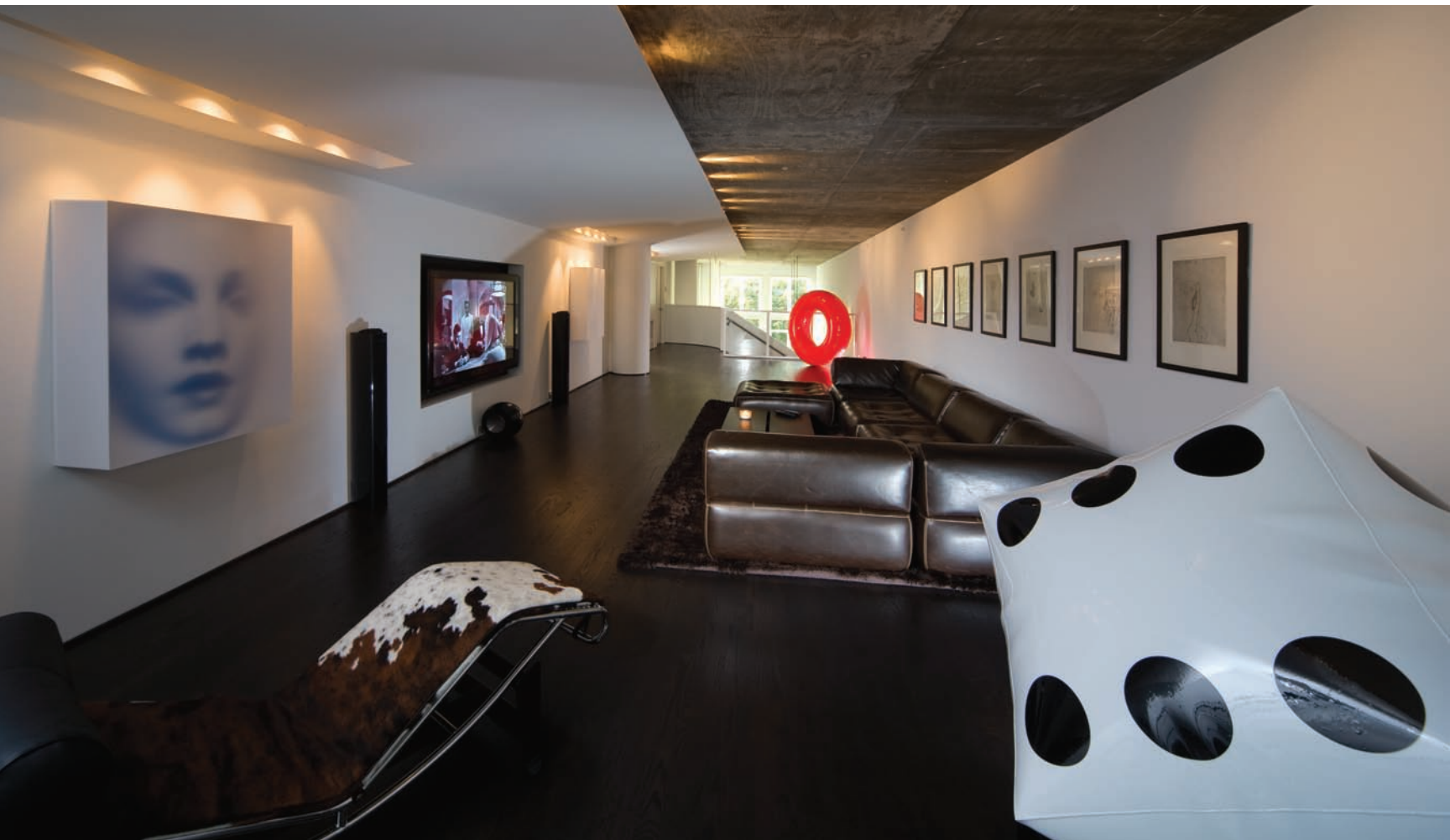
Moving to Houston's Manhattan Lofts has proven to be a smart move for this globetrotting couple. Centrally located in the heart of the city's thriving Uptown Galleria and Post Oak area, the luxury building is a mere sprint from abundant shopping, dining and recreational options. And the lock-and-leave convenience and security that this lifestyle affords homeowners is hard to beat.

"My husband travels internationally for his job and sometimes we stay for a while at our apartment in Paris," says the homeowner. "Living in a building like this makes sense for us."

But when thoughts of starting a family began to surface, so did concerns about living space. Their 2,313 square-foot, two-story unit wasn't up to family duty. The solution? Purchase another two-level loft on the same floor, across the hall, and combine them by tearing down a common wall upstairs—a major merger, minimalist style.

But who to pull it off?

Enter Steve Hood, a 35-year veteran of the construction trade and an expert in the foibles of vertical, high-in-the-sky renovations. He has become so specialized in such projects that he jokingly refers to the more conventional freestanding jobs as "houses on the ground." In short order, he ticks off a list of problems commonly encountered in loft, flat, and mid to-high-rise projects. But he just as quickly avows them as his favorite kind of job, "the kind with an edge." In short, he loves a challenge.





“Combining these two units from the standpoint of city code was fairly complicated, electrically and mechanically. To some extent, structurally too,” explains Hood. “The link between the two lofts was a common wall upstairs, but it was packed with elements that would be displaced in the process. That wall contained the utility rooms butted up with a bunch of closets. It’s where the air conditioning was located, the plumbing for the utility, cables, drainpipes, you name it. We needed a pretty creative solution to handle all of that.”

Enter another expert in such remodels, architect Robert Fowler, of Zk Building Design. The two are kindred spirits when it comes to such projects. Fowler had pulled Hood in on a renovation masterpiece a few years ago that involved combining three condominiums on the 17<sup>th</sup> floor of a tower. This time, Hood recommended Fowler to the homeowners.

“There are still plumbers and electricians looking for me to this day,” quips Fowler of his solution to the wall dilemma. He designed a beautifully sculptural way to deal with the assemblage of wires, drains, pipes and other assorted mechanics that had to be relocated. The mass is now serenely encased within a *nuage* (French for “cloud”) — a single-wedge, cross-section fur down that hovers above the combined loft’s new connecting gallery space upstairs. As if the solution were not visually perfect enough, soft light emanates from it, washing over artwork.

**Above** The kitchen received a complete overhaul with a system from the German company, Bulthaup, from Kuhl Linscomb. Cabinetry is in black-brown oak and countertops are a synthetic quartz-gray stone.

**Facing page above** The two lofts were combined through a common upstairs gallery space, achieving the couple’s dream of a home large enough for their growing family. On the right wall, art by Texas artist Paul Fleming.

**Facing page below** Reconfiguring of the second loft allowed for a room with an entertainment center.



Brownish-black porcelain tile floors and Absolute Black granite countertops combine for a sleek look in the master bathroom. The sink and countertop, not connected to the wall, appear to float.

“There were probably a dozen planning sheets devoted to what was going to occupy the *nuage*,” Fowler says. “It was a bit of a challenge. It’s like the old Thomas Edison problem. It’s two percent inspiration and 98 percent perspiration. Everyone was quite happy when that was done and all was concealed.”

No one is happier than the homeowners - proud parents of twin girls - who now comfortably occupy a consolidated 4,515 square feet. When all was said and done, the schematic of the design basically wrote itself. “From a poetry standpoint, you would simply try to make everything appear as if it had always been meant to be. It was just a matter of somehow making a predetermined amount of space read as though it had never been conceived of any other way,” Fowler explains. “From an architect’s standpoint, the building was a dream because it’s all poured-in-place concrete and we contemporary types love that raw space with tough concrete exposed and the tall windows, that type of thing.”

The original unit, overlooking the Williams Tower and multi-story sculptural fountain, contains a guest bedroom, main living space, dining area and new, spacious modernized kitchen outfitted in the German-made Bulthaup kitchen system from Kuhl Linscomb. Black-brown oak cabinets combine with countertops in synthetic quartz-gray stone for a less-is-more, streamlined look. Wood floors throughout the loft combination were treated to a dark stain to complement the cabinets. The upstairs master bedroom and bathroom received an overhaul too, with the master bathroom treated to brownish black porcelain floors and an Absolute Black granite vanity countertop that appears to float in space, latching onto three-quarter inch thick shower glass.

The second loft, almost a mirror image of the other, was reconfigured to accommodate new purpose. The kitchen on the

other side was partially walled up, allowing for another room that features an entertainment center. The smaller remaining kitchen is now primarily used as a utility room but still has workable kitchen features for entertaining.

The guestroom on the acquired loft side was converted into an exercise room and the upstairs bedroom, originally the master bedroom in that unit, is now a large, adorable bedroom in bold pink and red for the couple’s children. The girls’ bathroom was also completely remodeled, now gleaming in white Thassos marble.

The overall theme here is minimalist. Neutral furnishings, primarily from Roche Bobois and Ligne Roset combine with reproduction Le Corbusier pieces to act as a backdrop to bold artwork. The main connecting space upstairs is testimony to the couple’s fearless love of art. Larger-than-life aluminum and steel sculptures by artist William Canning flank the area.

Visionary works by Texas artist Paul Fleming hang on the wall in the living room and den. One cluster of molds is aptly named Hurricane for its fierce circulation of swirls. “My husband designed that one,” the homeowner says. “He is very good at that sort of thing. In fact, he is pretty much responsible for how our home looks. He is the one with a great design sense. And I can’t say enough good things about the people we worked with. We love the way it turned out.”

The couple rented a unit down the hall while construction took place. The project, meticulously managed and on schedule, went into overdrive during the final weeks to accommodate a new, important deadline—a visit from family. “They finished one day, we moved furniture in the next day and that night our guests came,” the homeowner recalls. “It’s great having all this new space. We love coming home to it. It’s so peaceful. It just fits us.” TH&L