

# INTERIOR DESIGN

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stairway to heaven



# INTERIOR DESIGN

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At Amangalla, a historical Sri Lankan hotel reinvented by Kerry Hill Architects, the spa's terrazzo-floored hallway ascends to treatment rooms. Photography: Ken Hayden.







# it's all in the balance

Spirit and art, work and home—contrasts achieve harmony at a  
New York yoga studio and residence by Steve E. Blatz

*text: judd tully photography: adrian wilson*







What would a New York loft look like if it had to embrace the suppleness of ancient yoga poses, the richness of provocative contemporary art, and the day-to-day requirements of eating and sleeping? Just ask architect Steve E. Blatz. Hired by a former sculptor who's now a collector, yoga instructor, and reflexologist, his namesake firm had to come up with a design flexible enough to accommodate her yoga studio, a reflexology room, an office, a sitting area, a kitchen, bedrooms, and baths, all without sacrificing her passion for privacy and serenity.

On top of that, Blatz says, "The architecture had to glorify the art." Some 750 pieces of it—or 751. "The client considered my work another part of her collection," he adds. "She commissioned me just as

**Previous spread:** A former sculptor, now a yoga instructor and reflexologist, hired Steve E. Blatz, Architect, to turn a New York industrial space into her live-work loft. In the gallery, Blatz built a platform of Bateig Azul limestone to showcase the client's own work as well as pieces by Anne Rochette and Ana Mendieta.

**Top:** The entry's ash walls form a backdrop for an Indonesian teak bench and Bruce Edelstein's sculpture. The blank panel door swings open to the private half of the loft; the adjacent door, with its porthole of acid-etched glass, indicates the guest bathroom; photography: Dan Bibb. **Center:** In the reflexology room, Mary Ann Unger's bronze sits on an ash floating cabinet. **Bottom:** Blatz carved out a recess for the cabinet, which also displays a ceramic fish by Russell Bush.

she would an artist, with very few restrictions." So the architect set about devising his own public/private construct for the loft, 4,500 square feet of former manufacturing space two stories above a busy street near the Empire State Building.

The urban bustle ceases the moment you step off the elevator. Immediately in front of you stand two folded planes composed of horizontal bands of pale ash, stacked 10 feet high. Between these two objects—more like striking pieces of furniture than architectural elements—a mysterious gap beckons.

Walk in, turn right, then left, and a hidden universe emerges.

Bathed in northern light, a handful of students proceed through a tailored, 60- or 90-minute regimen of shoulder or head stands and standing or seated *asanas*, or postures. All are based on the teachings of 87-year-old B.K.S. Iyengar—who developed his own yoga method incorporating supportive wooden blocks and cotton straps—so students here practice back bends and twists using ropes tethered to a pair of special walls that Blatz built in front of two structural columns. Apart from some audible breathing and the instructor's detailed instructions, the space is serenely quiet.

Running along the far wall, out of the way of the students, is Blatz's second sculptural intervention: a limestone platform that extends two thirds the length of the rectangular interior, presenting a stunning inventory of sculpture and paintings by artists →





*Ceramic tiles made by underprivileged schoolchildren compose the kitchen's backsplash, which serves as a transition between the stainless-steel appliances below and the custom ash cabinetry above. Rochette's sculpture in plaster and paper stands on top of the cabinets. The vintage oak table comes from a law library.*





both established and emerging. Cuban painter Ana Mendieta's biomorphic mixed-media work on paper strikes an arresting note in counterpoint to French sculptor Anne Rochette's stoic bronze female warrior. "It's a garden for art," Blatz says.

The combined yoga studio and gallery takes up the center of the loft's public half. During class time, the space is enclosed by aluminum-framed fiber-

glass folding screens that slide out from behind the two yoga walls. After students leave—they change back to their street clothes in a small room housed in one of the ash partitions—the screens slide away to reveal a kitchen on one side and a living area on the other.

In the living area, vintage, classic, and contemporary pieces mix: The curves of a mahogany-topped →





**Left:** Blatz furnished the living area with T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings's mahogany-topped table, circa 1950; Bruno Fattorini's Jill sofa; and Stephanie Odegard's handwoven wool-and-silk rug, which reflects the client's fascination with Eastern culture. The oil on canvas is by Sally Ross. **Right, from top:** The space between living area and kitchen serves as the lyengar yoga studio, with its rope walls; a dressing room is tucked inside the left-hand ash partition. Custom aluminum-framed fiberglass folding screens slide out from behind a yoga wall to close off the living area. Petah Coyne's sculpture of barbed wire, swamp roots, dust, and chain hangs near the guest room's Indonesian daybed.





- |                    |               |                   |
|--------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 1 ENTRY            | 4 GUEST ROOM  | 7 MASTER BATHROOM |
| 2 REFLEXOLOGY ROOM | 5 YOGA STUDIO | 8 MASTER BEDROOM  |
| 3 LIVING AREA      | 6 KITCHEN     |                   |



cocktail table by T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings and a tomato-red Womb chair and ottoman by Eero Saarinen balance the angularity of a low taupe sofa and Blatz's own white-lacquered drop-front desk. In the kitchen, the delicate black lines of a David Weeks ceiling fixture play off the honey-toned oak brawn of a vintage table designed for a law library.

The corners of the loft's public half actually fulfill more private functions. One holds the reflexology

**Top:** Blatz designed the lacquered bed and night table and the nylon lantern in the master bedroom. It's enclosed by an ash wall with inset acrylic strips.

**Bottom:** The master bath features a glassed-in steam room with stainless-steel hardware and glass mosaic tile. Beyond are the dressing room's run of ash-fronted closets and drawers.

**Opposite:** Between the master bedroom and dressing room, a ribbon of ash defines the limestone meditation room. The altar displays a photo of B.K.S. Iyengar and a statuette of Patañjali, the Hindu philosopher who introduced yoga. A Mexican mandala hangs from the ceiling.

room, where a focal wall in the palest mist color ties in with Blatz's overall palette of blues. He placed the guest room in the opposite corner. Here, the reposeful lines of an Indonesian daybed meet the gnarled form of a Petah Coyne sculpture of barbed wire, swamp roots, black dust, and chain, suspended rather menacingly from the ceiling.

The guest bathroom, distinguished by a door with a port-hole of acid-etched glass, stands

next to the self-effacing white door that swings open to the private quarters. The domestic sequence begins with a long dressing room, really a hallway. Lined at its widest point by ash-fronted closets and drawers, the hall then narrows to make space for the bathroom and its glass-enclosed steam shower, paved in glass mosaic tile.

To set off the master bedroom, Blatz built another ash wall, this one banded with inset acrylic strips. (An Isamu Noguchi-esque lantern brings out their translucent quality.) But the heart and soul of the master suite is the separate meditation room, a limestone platform that feels like a private island, sheltered beneath an arching ribbon of ash. This is where the client practices her daily Pranayama breathing exercises—and prepares herself to walk through the swing door, to work. ■

PROJECT TEAM: CAMILO CERRO; ENRIQUE CHAVEZ; TOMAS MICHALSKI.  
PLATFORM STONE (STUDIO), WALL TILE (BATHROOM), ALTAR STONE (MEDITATION ROOM): STONE SOURCE. RUNNER (ENTRY): CHILEWICH. CHAIR, OTTOMAN, PEDESTAL TABLE (LIVING AREA): KNOLL. REFRIGERATOR (KITCHEN): GENERAL ELECTRIC COMPANY. DISHWASHER: BOSCH. CUSTOM TILE: CITYARTS. CHAIRS: THROUGH STEVEN SCLAROFF. TABLE: THROUGH LEO DESIGN. SOFA (LIVING AREA): MDF ITALIA. RUGS (LIVING AREA, GUEST ROOM): ODEGARD. CEILING FIXTURE (KITCHEN): DAVID WEEKS LIGHTING THROUGH RALPH PUCCI INTERNATIONAL. TILE (BATHROOM): BISAZZA. SHOWER FITTINGS, DOOR HARDWARE: WATERWORKS. MILLWORK: AR-TEMA INTERNATIONAL. PAINT: PRATT & LAMBERT. GENERAL CONTRACTOR: WINTER TUFFY CONSTRUCTION.



