

PREMIERE ISSUE

LOFTS

URBAN LIFESTYLE EVERYWHERE

Best Loft
Cities in
America

Inside:
Loft listings, design ideas,
products and more

From the editors of *Romantic
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A clay sculpture of a hand, possibly a fist or a hand holding a small object, is the central focus. The sculpture is made of a light brown, textured material, likely clay or terracotta. It is positioned against a background of horizontal wooden slats, which create a rhythmic pattern of light and dark bands. The hand is shown from the wrist up, with the fingers curled inwards. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the clay and the grain of the wood. The overall composition is simple and elegant, with a focus on form and texture.

there's no place like
om



Dinah Ghen's
Manhattan
loft is part
art gallery,
part yoga
studio—
and entirely
a retreat
from
urban life

BY PAULA RIVEROS

LEFT: The idea of this kitchen was to facilitate maintenance as well as blend with the neutrality and visual tranquillity in the interior design. The tile backsplash features the work of children, who have created their own designs supported by art collector Ghen. The table is an oak vintage piece, formerly in a law library.

FAR LEFT: Anne Rochette's sculpture strengthens the character of the loft, even in the service areas.



DINAH GHEN'S MIDTOWN MANHATTAN LOFT IS AS multifaceted as she is. As a yoga instructor, a reflexologist and an art collector, her residence works overtime as a private art gallery (in which she showcases her collection of more than 700 pieces), a studio for yoga and reflexology, and an entertaining space for her frequent parties and guests. Within such a multifunctional space, one might expect chaos—and yet, the primary function of Dinah's loft is to serve as a retreat from the hectic pace of urban life.

In designing her home, Dinah's main objective was to attain versatility in the space—without losing the relaxed and open character that's so typical to New York lofts. Luckily, Dinah's architect, Steve Blatz, is an expert in such problem-solving. The concept of continuity has been the architect's obsession, and he has successfully managed to grant Dinah's every desire in the 1,300-square-foot loft.

Dinah would rather fill her walls and corners with energy rather than adding another piece simply to fill the space.

It wasn't easy, as each function of the loft presented unique challenges. As an art gallery, there had to be neutral space to allow each work of art to shine. Yoga, by contrast, required a room that promotes concentration and calmness. Finally, a home in the heart of a metropolis must be a shelter that soothes the stresses of life in the big city. There must be a relaxed vibe and cozy nooks—and the look must be chic and stylish at the same time.

OPPOSITE: Most of Dinah's art collection has been placed along this corridor to give an art gallery feel. A low platform made of limestone marks the way, along with highlighted works by Anne Rochette and Ana Mendieta. Artificial lighting spotlights the works and creates a calm atmosphere.



It takes two elevators to reach the loft, where the sensitivity and spirituality of the space is experienced immediately upon entry. Art not only decorates but it also models the spaces and marks ways around the flat. The floating wall made of ash wood helps discern a universe of knowledge and well-being.



Unfinished walls
define space while
keeping rooms
visually connected.



Blatz's solution was to develop permeable rooms that create physical and visual passages that simultaneously connect and separate the different uses of the space. The result is a beautiful, organic design that harmonizes every section of the loft. "I have known Steve Blatz for many years," says Dinah. "Before even imagining I was going to embark upon a housing project, one day I was in his apartment and I thought, 'this place is magnificent—it must be 2,000 square feet.' In fact, it was half that size. Steve makes rooms look broader than they really are, his interiors are fresh and open, and his concept gripped me." Inspired, Dinah embarked upon her own ill-timed housing project in 2001 that, unfortunately, coincided with the chaos and the scarcity of workers during the aftermath of September 11. Despite the general anxiety—and the uncertainty of the real-estate market, in particular—Dinah, who was advised by Blatz and her lawyer, discovered a unit in an old office-building located a few blocks away from the Empire State Building and decided it was an ideal place to settle down.





The space was in a dreadful state and divided into cubicles by several walls. Unusable, it had to be completely refurbished. Blatz took some yoga lessons in order to understand the mood and the energy level required by a room devoted to the practice and, drawing on his experience, he determined how to insulate the yoga room from the living room. At the same time, inspired by Eastern architectural elements, he connected both rooms with sliding aluminium and fiberglass sheaths, which diffuse the sunlight through the living room windows. There's a floating wall, made of ash wood, which separates the social areas from the yoga room, a curving wall that leads to a small meditation platform in Dinah's bedroom and a stone footbridge used to display sculptures along the corridor—all of which illustrate Blatz's ability to interweave spaces and introduce functionalities through

ABOVE: The furniture hails from Milan, Italy. The small mahogany table, with its undulations, strengthens the sense of fluidity between the rooms. Bruno Fattorini's sofa echoes the walls in similarly neutral shades, which are animated by details such as the colored cushions and the modern design of Eero Saarinen's red chair. The hand-woven carpet made of wool and silk by Stephanie Odergard is another example of Dinah's interest in Eastern cultures.

OPPOSITE: An ultra-modern cabinet contrasts with the small, primitive sculpture by Mary Ann Unger.





ABOVE: The bathroom's transparency allows the enjoyment of the works of art, even while one is taking a shower. The ventilation through the lateral windows prevents dampness that could ruin the art. Matching the rest of the materials used in the flat, the bathroom incorporates with white and ochre elements made of limestone, providing calmness and relaxation.

the use of natural, neutral elements. Another strong point in the architect's work has been joining the rooms through furniture, thus turning each piece into an architectural element.

The materials were chosen for their calm textures, and colors were selected based upon their ability to reflect light. (As such, Dinah selected yellows, sky blues and an array of whites to decorate her home.) "It was very important to me to use strictly cultivated wood to avoid an impact on the environment," she adds.

The feeling of peace and austerity is present in the loft, and minimalist coldness is noticeably absent. "I see Steve as an artist rather than an architect," says Dinah. "I wanted his part in the project to be like a work of art on which we would work together. He respects artistic work and knows how to give each piece its place. I have given him a great freedom of choice." Blatz has been involved in the loft's every detail, leaving some space for art in every room, though not on all surfaces and walls, thus providing visual breaks so that the view has not been compromised.

OPPOSITE: The studio where Iyengar yoga is practiced is central to the space. Located opposite the entrance, it fulfils Dinah's requirement of safeguarding privacy. Students are naturally led from the elevator into the room, and her bedroom is left unperturbed by visitors. The curving wall made of ash provides a beautiful, functional connection to the five rooms located around it. In this transition between indoors and outdoors, body and soul, there is a platform made of limestone, devoted to Pranayama breathing exercises. An altar with photographs of Hindu philosophers, dream catchers and Mexican mandalas makes up a universe devoted to spirituality.







Indeed, though Dinah is passionate about art, her home is not a cluttered one. Dinah would rather fill her walls and corners with energy rather than add another piece simply to fill the space. "At home, I like breathing in each room and allowing the works of art and objects to speak for themselves," she says. "I see possibilities in objects nobody else would see. I often visit flea markets, where I can always spot something that interests me." Of course, the still-empty walls present Dinah with something of a blank canvas: "There are still quite a few things out there, waiting to be found, which I would like to have on these walls," she says. ○

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STYLED BY MARIANA RAPOPORT
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TOP AND OPPOSITE: Thanks to the wooden shapes and the arrangement of the objects, the bedroom has an atmosphere that's calm, cozy and personal. The divisions do not reach the ceiling to allow a diffused light into the rooms. Most of the furniture—notably the bed, bookcase and many of the shelves—was designed by architect Steve Blatz. Thus, in every corner of the loft, the authenticity and the honesty of the design is found.



ABOVE: Souvenirs and traveling objects tell the story of trips to remote and exotic places in search of inner peace.