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Fall 2009 (Display until 12.28.09)

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A photograph of a modern living room. In the foreground, a beige sofa is partially visible with a thick, textured, light-colored blanket draped over it. To the left, a dark wood coffee table holds a stack of books. In the center, a beige sofa is adorned with several pillows, including a dark patterned one. A small, dark, round side table with a stack of three tiers holds a decorative, textured object. To the right, a floor lamp with a brass finish and a large, rounded shade stands on a tripod base. The room features large windows and glass doors that offer a view of a city skyline. The floor is made of dark wood. The overall aesthetic is clean, modern, and warm.

a grand production

A savvy young couple turns a vast raw space into a warm and inviting showplace.

Interior designer
Meichi Peng
outfitted the
living room with
nicely scaled
Flexform sofas.



BY MARNI ELYSE KATZ · PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATT KALINOWSKI · STYLING BY KARA BUTTERFIELD & JEFF OSBORNE



A curved plaster wall and staircase are embellished by a meticulously made steel screen.

It was the early spring of 2006 when Wendy Grad's Realtor showed her the cavernous single-level, 4,650-square-foot penthouse in the seven-story converted brick warehouse on Harrison Avenue.

Though it featured one of Boston's biggest roof decks (2,500 square feet) and abundant natural light, it was missing a few critical elements—like a kitchen ...and walls. The previous owner never finished construction, leaving behind a metal stud skeleton that followed a questionable floor plan. Anticipating an elaborate reconfiguration at an exorbitant cost, Grad moved on.

But after a season of looking at dilapidated single-family townhouses, she began to rethink the SoWa loft. The question was how much extra work Wendy, 34, a former management consultant turned stay-at-home mom, and her husband, a partner in a private equity firm, could handle. "Suddenly, putting in walls seemed pretty good compared to taking them down," says Wendy, and when they heard the loft was in foreclosure, they made a move.

Once in, the couple, who lived in a San Francisco loft before moving to a cramped Back Bay rental, warmed to the idea of an open floor plan. But Wendy didn't want to listen to every football game her husband watched. So they hired Ruhl Walker Architects to resolve the noise quandary and to fit in three bedrooms, two offices, and a wine cellar without cluttering up the space with several small rooms.

The original skeleton layout featured a long, dark entry hallway. Other architects encouraged the Grads to keep this configuration, but Brad Walker suggested the loft's assets—high ceilings, fabulous vistas—should be apparent right from the start. "The amazing thing about the space is its sheer volume and its views," says Walker. "I wanted to play that up—so when you walk in the door, you get that 'aha' moment." Wendy agreed. "Brad's vision for the space was so different than what anyone else had pitched, we knew we had to hire him."

Near the entry, Walker created an informal vestibule perfect for dropping off coats, bags, and strollers. He clustered the smaller rooms—the nursery,

guest room, Wendy's office, and media room—vertically at this end of the space, creating a sort of three-story townhouse within the high-ceilinged loft. At the top is an exercise room and access to a roof deck with a 10-person Jacuzzi and AstroTurf lawn.

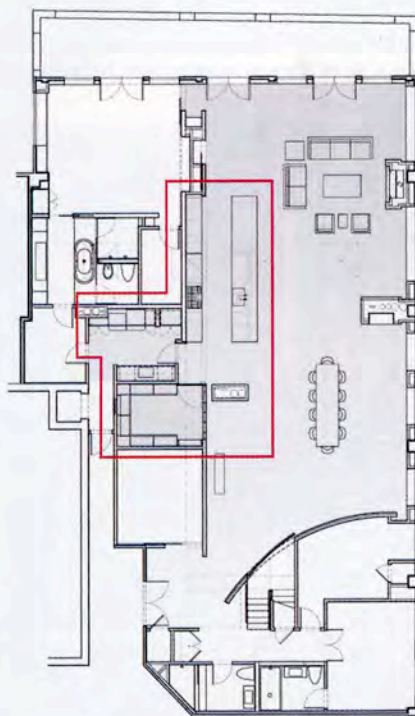
The main event, however, is the amazing 1,904-square-foot living space (with 17-foot-high ceilings) just beyond the vestibule. A 27-foot-long curved plaster wall draws the eye from the entrance into this grand space, which comfortably accommodates a dining room for 10, an Arclinea kitchen with a 20-foot-long island, and an earth-toned living room. "The palette is about warm neutrals but within that vocabulary I like to mix in a little cool," Walker explains. The gray laminate kitchen, for example, features an island wrapped in Ice Flower soapstone, providing workspace aplenty and seats for casual dining. The cool grays of Pietra Cardosa tile and soapstone, as well as stainless steel appliances, contrast with the neutral hues of the furniture, selected by designer Meichi Peng of Meichi Peng Design Studio. "Without the contrast, the warmth gets lost," adds Walker.

The Grads hadn't planned on using an interior designer—they have a modern sensibility that works well with loft living. But when they started laying out their own furniture in the oversize space, they realized they needed help. Peng chose appropriately scaled pieces such as low-lying linen Flexform sofas and Poliform tables, which worked well with the Grads' Modenature chairs. Peng also custom designed the living and dining room tables and an oak staple bench near the entry, all of which Wendy says transforms the daunting space into a comfortable family home.

Fortunately, there are plenty of hiding places for her toddler's multiple strollers and toys—including a large pantry with a washer and dryer tucked behind the kitchen. And Wendy's

husband got a wine storage room, hidden behind a panel next to the kitchen. Inside, there are enough ebony-stained ash slots to accommodate 1,000 bottles, and a narrow slab of granite set on stainless steel legs for wine tasting.

It's not the wine cellar, sleek bathrooms, or early-morning view of the Pru that Wendy loves most about her new home (though make no mistake, she adores all of those things). It's the family-friendliness of the space. "It's so easy being a mom here," she says. "There's room for kids to run and grownups to lounge around. You don't think of urban living being like this, especially with a family. I just love it." ■



The plan shows how the home's unusual layout allows for townhouse living in one area and open loft living in another.

ARCHITECT Ruhl Walker Architects, Boston **INTERIOR DESIGN** Meichi Peng Design Studio, Boston **CONTRACTOR** Sleeping Dog Properties, Boston



Above, a view of the large loft space from the second-floor media room balcony. Below, from left, a slatted wall outfitted with Thermopane glass pivots to reveal the wine storage room, large enough for 1,000 bottles; Wendy in the Arlinea kitchen, which features a 20-foot-long soapstone island.





A large room is made cozy with a fur throw from Madura and a leather Arne Jacobsen Egg Chair from Metro Retro Furniture.