

## HOUSE PROUD

## The Borrowers: Looking High and Low

By ELAINE LOUIE

**A** RAW, gritty loft can become a honey-hued home, given enough courage, money and skill.

Last year Jacqueline Heer, a photographer and an artist, bought a Cinderella of an apartment — the last one left after her building, a former garment factory on West 36th Street, was converted to a condominium — and with the help of two designers and a contractor turned it into a sleek, still hard-edged place softened by golden light. Although the raw space offered 1,650 square feet on the 14th floor (with a sliver of a Hudson River view), it “looked like a basement,” Ms. Heer recalled, in no small part because of exposed ceiling ducts. The asking price was \$1 million; Ms. Heer got the place for \$950,000.

She had another \$325,000 for improvements, or enough to build two bedrooms, two bathrooms and a kitchen with an unusual mix of low-cost plywood cabinetry and top-of-the-line appliances.

Ms. Heer's real estate agent, Charles Hawkins of Halstead Property, fixed her up with her helpmates: Steven Schappacher, an architect, and Rhea White, an interior designer, who happen to rent an office in the building — 315 West 36th Street — for their firm, SchappacherWhite, and who rent a loft there, too. The couple, who are married, had a contractor, Zeljko Todorovic, who had helped them with the renovation of their loft and other projects over eight years, yielding a kind of safety net.

“I bought the place because there were Steve, Rhea and Zeljko,” said Ms. Heer, who also has a home in Berlin. “I couldn't risk doing it with an architect and a contractor I didn't know.”

She was also open to the idea of using unusual materials, some not necessarily intended for residential use — things like wall panels designed to be used on ships.

Mr. Schappacher started with the ductwork, left there by the upstairs neighbor, one of the developers of the condo, who wanted heat and air-conditioning blown into his apartment from registers in his floor.

The ducts dangle from one end of Ms. Heer's apartment to the other. To hide them, Mr. Schappacher created one long translucent canopy, which doubles as a source of soft light.

First he divided the ducts into thirds, or bays. Each bay corresponds to one of three main areas near the windows at the front of the loft: a bedroom, kitchen and living area (with a second bedroom hidden behind a new wall).

Then he wrapped rope lighting — low-wattage bulbs enclosed in clear, flexible plastic tubes — around the ducts, “like

## PENNIES AND SILVER

Blond cabinets, translucent panels and doors, and a luminous canopy soften the edges of a loft in a former factory on the West Side of Manhattan. Its designers mixed high- and low-end products, paneling a Sub-

Zero refrigerator with plywood and covering walls with a black sound-absorbing material, right. Aluminum shelves, below right, end at a Plexiglas door with a perforated steel overlay. Light passes through fiberglass room dividers and the acrylic and fiberglass ceiling canopy, below far right; the dividers create separate spaces for lounging and sleeping, inset far right top.

wrapping lights around a Christmas tree,” he said, and plugged them into three new ceiling outlets.

He used steel cable to attach wooden dowels to the ducts in each bay. The dowels were cut at an angle, so that when screwed to sheets of a flexible, translucent plastic called Lumasite, the result was a gracefully rounded 50-foot lampshade.

The ugly ductwork is now a swan — and

the dominant feature of the loft.

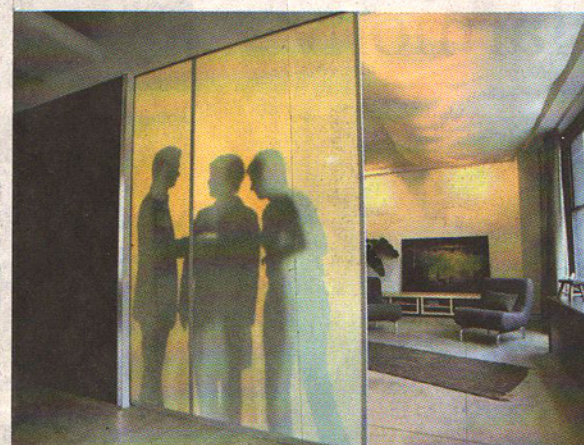
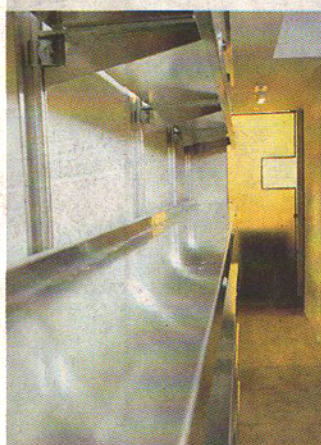
Mr. Schappacher, who likes to use materials for purposes other than what they were originally intended for, then turned to details of the living space.

In the kitchen area, he designed cabinetry made of inexpensive Baltic birch plywood. In another unusual move, he had the contractor install Formica on the counters upside down: the brown color suggests palm

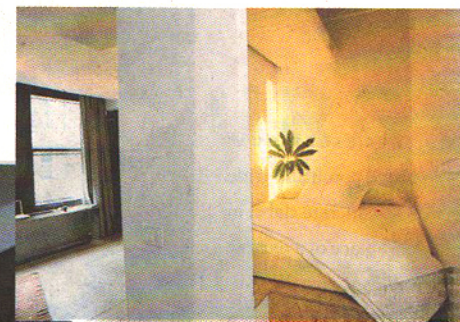
wood, he said, and “it's more durable than a wood veneer surface.” And a good deal cheaper: a 4-by-8-foot sheet of Formica is about \$60, compared with \$200 for the same amount of walnut veneer. To deepen the Formica's hue, he finished it with oil.

Two newly installed bathrooms are also warmly colored. One is tiled in peach, the other in pale lime.

Since the loft has hard, acoustically bright



Photographs by Ángel Franco/The New York Times



## Specs: From Boats And Christmas Trees

**T**O turn raw space into livable quarters, Steven Schappacher, an architect, and Rhea White, an interior designer, (212-279-1675), used unusual materials and design solutions. They wrapped ceiling ducts with EP Flexi-light low-watt tubes — \$4.50 a yard at Eighth Avenue Lighting, 545 Eighth Avenue, (212) 279-1323 — and hid them behind a Lumasite “lampshade”; from \$4.83 a square foot at American Acrylic, (800) 627-9025 or americanacrylic.com. Quiet Pro, a sound-absorbing polypropylene material, faces some of the walls. A 2-by-4-foot sheet is \$34.81 from McMaster-Carr, (732) 329-3200 or mcmaster.com. Translucent doors were made of fiberglass bonded to aluminum honeycomb; \$18 a square foot from Panelite, (212) 343-0995 or panelite.us. Aluminum shelves start at \$16 a linear foot at E-Z Shelving Systems, (800) 353-1331 or e-zshelving.com.

The renovation, which included two new bathrooms and custom plywood cabinets, was done by ZT Construction, a Queens contractor, (718) 899-0408.

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surfaces — concrete floor, glass windows — he covered one set of walls with an inky black sound-absorbing material called Quiet Pro. (Because it is also water resistant, the material is used on ships.) To maximize light, he created sliding pocket doors made of translucent Panelite, fiberglass sheets bonded to an aluminum honeycomb core. From a distance, the honeycomb pattern looks pixelated, a material of the digital age.

Finally, Mr. Schappacher transformed the rear wall behind the kitchen into a hallway library with aluminum shelves. At the end of the hallway is the laundry room, and even that homely, usually forgotten space has been given a touch of high tech chic with a door of perforated steel over Plexiglas. By keeping the light on in the laundry room, the room glows and beckons. It might even make doing the laundry fun.