

ART EFFECTS

A gallery becomes the perfect space for living, working, and being curatorial

BY GINA BAZER PHOTOGRAPHY BY BOB COSCARELLI



Concrete slabs that designer Lukas Machnik (right) and artist Lonney White found in an alley serve as an end table in their living room. **OPPOSITE** Design books, magazines, and sculptural objects, including a human skull, occupy a ledge in Machnik's office.





LUKAS MACHNIK, AN INTERIOR DESIGNER, and artist Lonney H. White III didn't set out to move into a live-work space. "We wanted to be able to shut the door and go home after work," says White, who is represented by Holly Hunt. But when they came across a 4,000-square-foot gallery space (2,000 square feet on the main floor, 2,000 in the basement) in the West Loop, they decided the arrangement could work after all. "It was the full package—studio, gallery, home," recalls Machnik.

Or it had the potential to be, anyway. The two set to work, undaunted by vestiges of a cheesy 1980s storefront exhibition space: red, orange, and blue walls; stairs with steel pipe railings leading to a second-floor catwalk; a tiny kitchenette (presumably for stocking tricolor pasta and Bartles & Jaymes). It took them eight months to transform this time capsule into an uber-sophisticated modern home that feels at once relaxed and rigorously avant-garde. With the couple's clear and unified vision, it was a cakewalk on the catwalk.

"Our philosophy was to keep the rawness of the space—which was a hardware store in the 1800s and still had the original floors—and juxtapose this rawness with minimalist architecture and important postwar pieces," says Machnik. At every turn, you find bold artwork and furniture, including Medusa-like felted wool throws by the versatile White and sculptures by Machnik.

The property is a departure from their previous home, a pre-war Lake View condo with a formal dining room and crown molding. Here, they got rid of all trim, opting for simple white drywall, and avoided dividing spaces. "Art shows better when space doesn't confine," Machnik adds.

The dining area, essentially a hallway leading to the living room at the back of the house, is defined by a 16-foot table of ebony-reclaimed pine with matching benches, which the couple built onsite. The bedroom, unconventionally located at the front of the home, opens onto the entry hallway and has no door.

"We liked the idea of giving people a voyeuristic moment," says Machnik, who created a bedside vignette (a superlow nightstand, which is part of the frame of the platform bed, with a playful grouping of 1960s Italian sconces hanging above) that passersby can glimpse through the floor-to-ceiling opening. The home is full of scenes like these: a dramatic display of over-size ceramic vessels on the kitchen counter; beat-up concrete slabs repurposed as an end table in the living room; a crisp white ledge topped with art books, figurines, and a human skull in Machnik's office.

The couple describe their design style as "curated," and the term couldn't be more apt. "Our friends say that every time they come over, there is something new to look at," says Machnik. That's life in a gallery.

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In the foyer, two steel sculptures and a desk and chair of bronze, all by White, showcase his versatility as an artist. A tall slit provides a peek into the bedroom. **OPPOSITE** Hide rugs and a primitive high-backed wooden chair share space with vintage 1960s prototype Sling 657 chairs by Charles Pollock for Knoll.

Machnik descends the stairs from his office to the living room. Inventive texture mixes—like the sawtooth staircase against the painted brick wall—make white elements active participants in the design scheme.



A 1952 Bird chair by Harry Bertoia is draped with a leather shawl by Machnik in a loft space accessible by catwalk from the second-floor office.





In the bedroom, Machnik used unfinished maple for the bench and the platform bed frame with attached nightstands. "We don't worry about the surface getting marked up—we can just sand it off," he says. White made the lacy felt throw. The wood floor is original to the building, which housed a hardware store in the 1800s. **RIGHT** The couple's dog, Luie, lies on the bed. Next to it, an example of what Machnik describes as a "curated moment": vintage sconces by Artemide cofounder Ernesto Gismondi hang over books and a horse skull. Machnik bought the sconces at Pavilion, one of his favorite stores.





A long table and matching benches define the dining area in a wide hallway. White's dramatic paintings incorporate encaustic, thread, and metal alloy spills.



A low ceiling sets the kitchen off from the adjacent dining space. Stainless steel cabinet fronts are the same size for uniformity; they conceal drawers and other organizational elements.



The basement is White's work zone. The front part is the "clean area"; a table is surrounded by 1960s-era polished chrome chairs by Gastone Rinaldi and a first-production 1951 Charles and Ray Eames side chair. In back is the "dirty area," where White makes his art. **RIGHT** The 1970s Milo Baughman table in multiple woods provides ample work surface for Machnik; the S chair is by Verner Panton for Vitra.