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THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

A former warehouse opens up possibilities
for a live-work condo. *By Neal McLennan*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL BOLAND STYLING BY MAUREEN WILLICK



LIGHT, BRIGHT

John Henshaw and Joy Chao took full advantage of the high ceilings in the loft with loads of storage in the kitchen—including open shelving to display Henshaw's sculptural work.

SILK ROAD
An airy textile provides texture on flat corridor walls. John Henshaw and Joy Chao in the "office," part of the open-concept living room (opposite).



When Messrs. McLennan and McFeely built their warehouse on the corner of Columbia and Cordova in Vancouver's then-burgeoning Gastown, it's a safe bet they weren't trying to ensure that the building had good light. The year was 1906, and it was space, not light, that they needed to accommodate their rapidly expanding hardware business.

Fast-forward a century. Architect John Henshaw and his partner Joy Chao were looking for a condo, and the once-again burgeoning neighbourhood of Gastown was barely on their radar. "We looked in the Broadway corridor, the Kingsway area, South Granville and Yaletown and couldn't find the right space," says Chao. The fact that the pair were ensconced in suburban Oakridge—albeit in a



contemporary condo—made the move to Vancouver's edgiest neighbourhood all the more unlikely.

But when the couple happened upon a still-unfinished suite on the sixth floor of McLennan and McFeely's old warehouse (since renamed the Koret Lofts after a subsequent owner) they knew they had found their spot. "It was the light," says Henshaw as he spreads his arms out across the cityscape framed in an expansive panorama by the floor-to-ceiling windows in the couple's corner unit.

And if the windows weren't enough, the mild-mannered Henshaw somehow convinced the developer to allow more modifications, including some custom skylights, which allowed in even more light. "Being able to customize the space was a huge draw for us," explains Henshaw. "I wanted a space where I could be involved in the whole process and could get my hands actually working on some materials."

And the skylights were just the beginning. The pair reversed the entire orientation of the bedroom and kitchen, so that the latter now enjoys views over the city while the former has a more private feel. A welcome by-product of the reversal is that instead of entering one great room, as in a traditional loft, a visitor now walks through a narrow corridor until suddenly being presented with the loft's full view. "It definitely adds to the drama," says Chao.

A blockbuster kitchen was a must for avid cook Chao, whose level of order for all things culinary is demonstrated by the fact that she took a complete inventory of every tool and utensil in her arsenal and then had custom inserts made so that everything had its place. "Hopefully it means she can't buy anything else," jokes Henshaw.

Another customization was Chao's requirement that the modestly sized space (1,400 square feet) have a dedicated laundry room where they could air-dry clothes. (Chao has an aversion to dryers.) This task was accomplished by opting for low-profile European machines from Miele and by foregoing the usual condo ritual of stacking them in order to create an extended drying area above the machines—all in the space of a medium-size closet.

In the bedroom, Henshaw's requirement was to have a show-stopping shower that was accomplished both by investing in a double Grohe showerhead combo and by having a floor-to-ceiling window serve as one shower wall. Henshaw claims that he wanted to keep the glass clear (which would have been a true show stopper for the surrounding buildings) but Chao demurred. "I'm not that brave."

Some of the condo's other interesting design features were born more out of necessity than aesthetics. The inside of the front door, for example, is sheathed in a veneer of polished steel, giving the small foyer an industrial feel while reflecting abundant light from the overhead skylight. When complimented, Henshaw sheepishly looks down at Monty, the couple's four-year-old Maltese. "The steel is there so he can't scratch the front door," says Chao.

Henshaw and Chao are now complete acolytes of the urban lifestyle, glad that they followed the light to Gastown. CONDO See SOURCES, page 90.



VIEW WITH A ROOM

Unobtrusive track lighting and minimal decor keep the focus right where it should be: on this magnificent wall of windows. A pebble-like floor on the shower massages the bather's soles (opposite).

"Being able to customize the space was a huge draw for us."



GET THE LOOK

Ground an all-white space with warm finishes and bursts of colour.

La Palma stools

The warmth of these La Palma stools in dark walnut nicely balances the coolness of their glass-and-chrome backdrop. From \$705.

Sea-glass vase

Henshaw and Chao added splashes of colour to the white kitchen with decorative abstract pieces, like this blue and aqua Murano sea glass bowl from Birks. \$395.

Leaf lamp

It's an ideal fit for small home offices: adjust the stem of the Herman Miller Leaf lamp for direct or ambient light. From \$530.

Cocktail table

Even topped with a vase of flowers, the low base of this Cecchini cocktail table allows a clear sight line across the room. From \$2,111.

Sectional sofa

The couple used a sofa system to fill their large living area. The Andy sectional by B&B Italia can be customized in a range of configurations and fabrics. From \$16,073.

Pebble tile

Beach-pebble tile on the shower floor lends a warm, earthy feel to the space. \$12.94 per piece.

