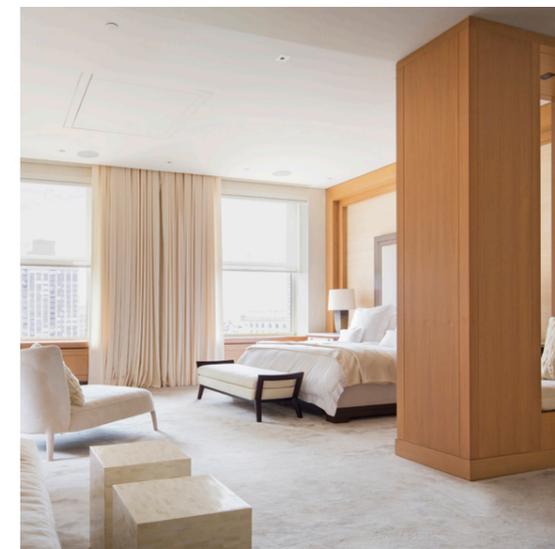




Above: A custom fixture by Holly Hunt hangs in front of a drawing by Al Held.
Opposite: The bright master bedroom.



UPGRADE

Lofty Ideas

A capacious apartment near Madison Square Park seems to glow from within, thanks to warm, built-in woodwork and a clever floorplan that maximizes natural light

PHOTOGRAPHED BY SCOTT FRANCES

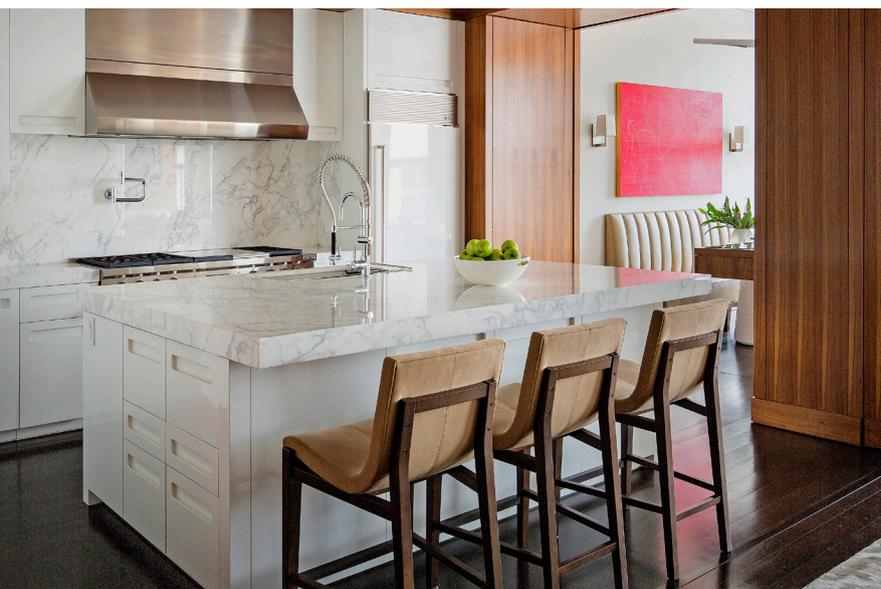
Once the province of artists, musicians and other renegades, the New York City loft has been so thoroughly glamourized in recent decades that it's almost a shock to be reminded that these apartments do have their drawbacks. "The problem with these spaces, historically, is that they're very dark," notes the architect and interior designer Campion Platt. "These buildings were originally used for manufacturing," so a large

loft—like the 5,000-square-footer on the north side of Madison Square Park that he was hired to re-envision—is likely to have at least a few corners that are, as he puts it, "very far from a window."

The challenge, then, was to create a floor plan that permits as much natural light as possible to permeate the space. "The building had been converted by the sponsor," Platt explains, "and this was basically a finished apartment that we then

proceeded to gut." Prior to the renovation, he says, "the design was very broken-up. The entryway, for example, was completely closed-off; if you shut all the doors, it was a very dark space."

So, Platt says, he set about moving walls and reorganizing rooms, creating different pathways throughout the apartment in order to make it "breathe better." The master closet was moved to the center of the apartment, "because a closet doesn't need windows," and the entryway was con-



Clockwise from top:
 A view of the remarkably open main living area, which includes the great room and the breakfast room beyond; another angle on the great room, featuring a painting by Louise Fishman; the white lacquered kitchen, which is open to the breakfast room (and its commissioned Elliot Puckette painting), but which can also be closed behind wooden pocket doors during dinner parties.



Clockwise from top: The guest bedroom features a settee from The Bright Group and a view of Madison Avenue; a corner of the lounge, which showcases the millwork found throughout the apartment; the media room, which boasts a Marilyn Minter photograph and custom upholstered furniture.

verted into a more gallery-like space, perfect for showing off certain key pieces from the owners' impressive collection of contemporary drawings, paintings, and photographs, which they assembled over the last several years with the help of art advisor Karen Amiel.

"The process was very specific to the space," Amiel reports. "One mistake that's often made in the hopeful marriage of art and architecture is that the scale is off. So we looked at the floorplans early on and we zeroed in on the walls that we thought would be optimum [places to display art]. We also

thought about the sightlines—if two paintings are in the same field of vision, it's important to think about the relationship between them, even if they're thirty feet apart." Despite these considerations, though, Amiel clarifies that the apartment's owners don't see the work of artists like Elliott Puckette, Terence Koh and Marilyn Minter as mere decoration. "They're interested in exploring the intellectual content of the work."

Aside from the art, the loft's most distinctive feature is probably the custom millwork throughout, which is used to hide columns,

define rooms, and, as Platt says, "soften the space; it makes it look more inviting and residential." The wood—which is mostly American Walnut, chosen for its naturally warm hue—unifies the space, as do the few other materials used. "You can't have too many tricks in an apartment," explains the architect. "Three or four is the max. Here, we went with dark ebonized floors, chalk-white Venetian plaster walls, and anodized bronze trim." The result is a loft that manages to be capacious without being the least bit cavernous.—LAUREN WATERMAN