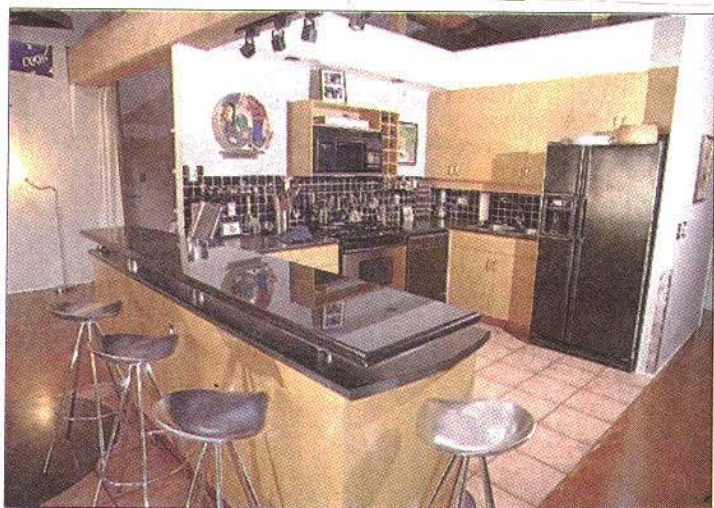
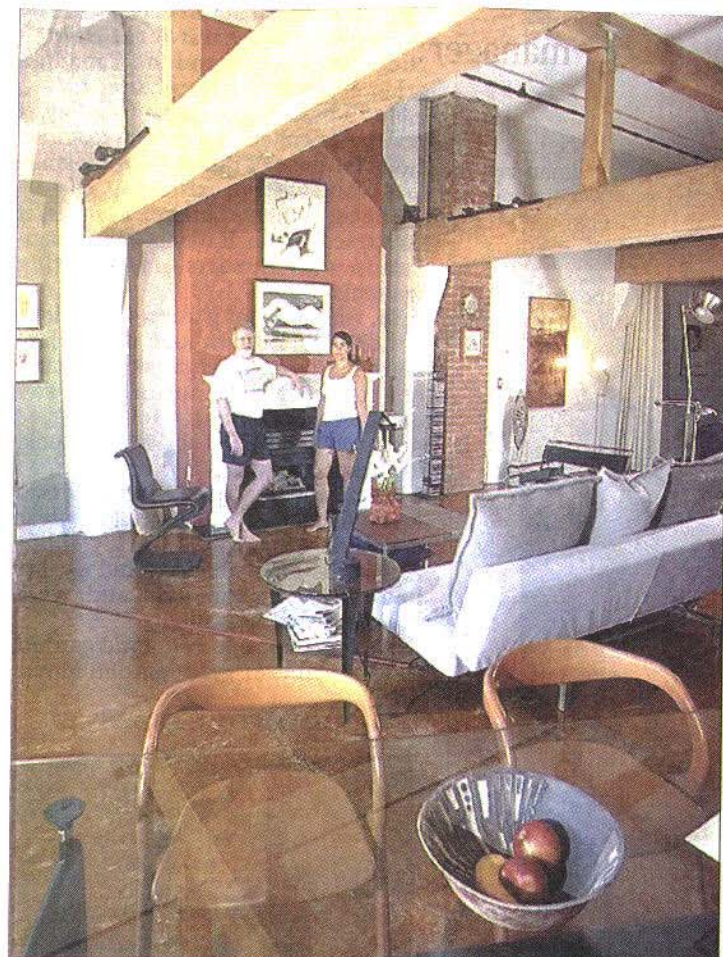


Lofty lifestyles



WARD PERRIN/VANCOUVER SUN

The open kitchen in the Kuenzes' loft has clean, efficient lines.



WARD PERRIN/VANCOUVER SUN

The Kuenzes treated the floor with a terra cotta-coloured etch.

CITY LIVING | A couple's loft in Gastown gives them their perfect environment



BY KAREN GRAM
VANCOUVER SUN



WARD PERRIN/VANCOUVER SUN

Becky and Bob Kuenz enjoy the rooftop patio of their loft.

Some say lofty ideas come easier in lofty locales. You wouldn't get any argument about that from natural gas engineer Bob Kuenz. He and his wife Becky opted for loft-living 10 years ago and since then they have lived all over the Northwest under the high ceilings of converted warehouses.

They have lived, worked and been inspired in their current loft in the heart of Gastown since last November and they believe this is where they will stay for a long time.

"It's a very calm environment," says Becky. "And you can do what ever you want in this kind of space. You can put the bedroom right in the middle if you want."

They love the neighbourhood and the community of people they have befriended there, including the old guy who takes up daily residence on their front stoop and with whom they chat about the weather and global warming. They love that they can walk to the library or downtown or to Chinatown where they buy their groceries from the butchers, fishmongers and vegetable hawkers for prices Yaletown dwellers can only dream of. They love how living in the inner city keeps them grounded, reminded daily of the contrast between the haves and the have nots.

They love the high ceilings, huge old wooden beams and the great view of the working harbour and the North Shore mountains.

And since moving in, they have turned the whole 1,300 square feet inside and 750 square feet on the roof into a work of art, beginning with the installation of a very steep spiral staircase (45-inch diameter, 24 stairs with 1-inch overlap) in the centre of the room which takes them up through a skylight and on to the rooftop deck.

The loft living trend began in New York City in the 1970s when artists facing high rents in their old haunts of Chelsea and Greenwich Village began moving into derelict light-industrial warehouses in Manhattan,



WARD PERRIN/VANCOUVER SL

Lofts appeal to people who like big, undefined spaces

From C1

first in Soho, later in Tribeca and most recently the "meat-packing" district by the Hudson river.

The high ceilings, big open space and good lighting appealed to them, as did the freight elevators, which allowed them to transport large and heavy materials to their lofts.

The loft movement has even been credited with influencing the art itself; the small paintings of Parisian garrets gave way to gigantic Jackson Pollock-style triptychs that could easily be developed in the wide expanses lofts offered.

Those early lofts, which were usually not zoned as living spaces, also influenced a whole new design trend of minimalism and stow-away furniture, which was needed by the artists to conceal the fact that they not only worked late into the night, but slept over and ate breakfast there.

While lofts today are no longer just for artists, those who have adopted the lifestyle still live, work and sleep in the wide open.

Vancouver real estate agent Ed Gramauskas of Dexter Associates Realty says lofts cost about the same as condos in the city but they appeal to people who like big, bright, undefined or funky spaces. They can be as small as 500 square feet or as big as three times that, but the high ceilings, big windows and lack of defining walls make them seem bigger.

Since the city adjusted its bylaws 12 years ago to permit artist live/work spaces, warehouses have been converted and developers have started building loft-style spaces — in all there are 2,200 units currently for sale in 52 buildings, says Gramauskas. They range in price from \$140,000 to more than \$500,000. Gramauskas' Web site, www.loftsvancouver.com, shows all the lofts available in the city.

Bob and Becky Kuenz gave up house living after a stint in Malaysia, which taught them how to live in smaller spaces. Lofts are perfect for them because they don't like to do yard work, or a lot of house cleaning. It's easy to keep a loft tidy and clean because it's so open, says Becky.

They love the open space so much that they don't even have full walls around the washroom. They recommend visitors turn on the fan because sound travels easily over the three-quarter height walls.

Bob runs his consulting business from a sparse table in a corner, with no computer to clutter up the lines.

Becky took what was a plain concrete box and transformed it into a beautiful home. She treated the concrete floor with a terra cotta-coloured acid etch, giving it a mottled irregular look, and then applied acrylic sealer to make it shine.

The concrete walls have been softened with the installation of drywall panels to cut the echo and enhance the soundproofing. Becky painted each a different strong colour, making ideal back-



IAN LINDSAY/VANCOUVER SUN

Professional-style kitchen is used for Murray Bancroft's work as a food stylist.

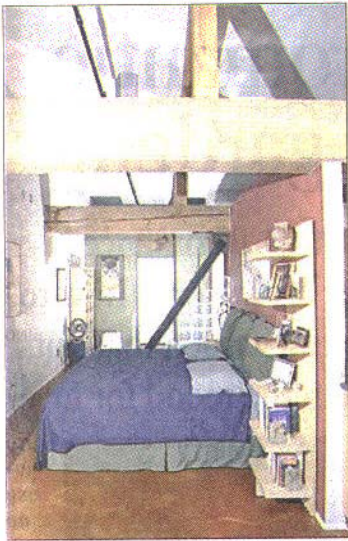
drops for her eclectic collection of original art.

All the modern furnishings have simple, clean lines.

"I wanted it simple so we could highlight the art," says Becky, who still plans to revise the look of the open kitchen, wrapping the bar in stainless steel and installing cherry wood kitchen cabinets.

Murray Bancroft's 900-square-foot loft at Sixth and Cambie was never a warehouse. It was built as a live/work loft, but that doesn't matter to Bancroft or his partner Sarah Reeder.

For them it is affordable housing in the middle of the city, walking distance from work for Reeder, editor of *Fashion Vancouver*, and equally close to a collection of photo studios used by Bancroft, a food stylist and chef consultant. They don't own a car, choosing instead to belong to CanCar, a co-op that provides them with wheels when they need them.



WARD PERRIN/VANCOUVER SUN

The ease of keeping a loft clean and tidy is appreciated by Becky and Bob Kuenz.



IAN LINDSAY/VANCOUVER SUN

Murray Bancroft and partner Sarah Reeder say they love their loft's open feeling and lack of clutter.

It's a lifestyle thing, Bancroft says — not well suited to families, but great for self-employed couples or singles who like the decks to be clear without a lot of effort. Loft living is a perfect blend of form and function, he says. It's a place for doing, not for displaying knick-knacks or other clutter.

"We like it pretty simple," he says, pointing to the plain grey concrete floors and walls. "We don't worry about people taking their shoes off, don't worry about gardening — and it's pretty low maintenance."

The stainless-steel counters in the professional kitchen allow Bancroft to gut a salmon and then hose it down without worrying about bacteria. The scarcity of interior walls allows the couple to entertain and easily clear away, to prepare food but not be boxed

into a little room isolated from the guests.

"We are still amazed when we have people over at how effortless it is to pile everything up and put it away," he says, adding they can easily move furniture around when necessary.

Their bedroom is upstairs in a loft within a loft. And instead of hiding a bed in the closet as the early New York artists had to do, Bancroft hides his work — a computer on which he writes freelance food articles — in a bedroom closet. When he wants to work, he just rolls up a chair and pulls out the computer keyboard.

He gets some pretty lofty ideas up there.