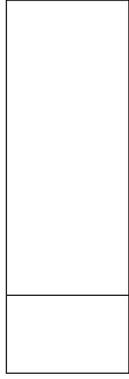


3



ARTHOUSE

THREE SPACES





Above: The team salvaged brick from old buildings to match the dimensions of the brick used in the home's original construction. Because it was going to be painted, it didn't matter what color it was.

At a time in which Denver's modernist leanings have yielded a host of remarkable buildings, the Art House Townhomes have emerged as possibly the strongest recent development in the city.

Developed as part of a master plan by Continuum Partners and completed in 2005, the Art House Townhomes have quickly set the standard for top-shelf contemporary architecture here. Designed by Studio Completiva (Yong Cho and Catherine Mercer, architects), Art House is a function of a Continuum development incorporating the new Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), a large private residence, and the townhomes themselves. In 2004, British Architect David Adjaye won the commission to design the MCA through a hard-fought selection process, thus putting an apt end cap, or exclamation point, on the development.

The MCA design committee purposely eschewed the notion of bringing in a starchitect for the project, as had been the trend, instead opting for a rising luminary in Mr. Adjaye, a man whose work is synonymous with elegant, forward-looking design and sustainable materials. The MCA was in fact the first Gold LEED-certified museum built in the U.S., using 40 percent less energy than comparable buildings, continuing

a standard that had been set by the Art House Townhomes, another LEED-certified project. Studio Completiva interacted little with the offices of Mr. Adjaye, having proceeded into design and buildout well before the architect was chosen for MCA Denver, but the designs mesh quite harmoniously.

Across from the museum rises the fortresslike private residence of Mark Falcone (founder of Continuum Partners, whose other notable work includes the Belmar development in Lakewood) and his wife, noted designer Ellen Bruss. The home, also designed by Mr. Adjaye, presents the imposing facade of a medieval castle, while cradling the light, elegant, beating heart of a Glass House. Mr. Falcone and Mrs. Bruss oversaw the design and buildout of the MCA, as well as their own home and the 13 Art House residences. As Mrs. Bruss notes, "the museum is the contemporary church." If that's so, residents of the adjacent Art House have a remarkable altar at which to worship.



STUDIO COMPLETIVA

ARTHOUSE ARCHITECTS

Studio Completiva, Inc., a 12-person Denver firm established in 1995, has consistently set the tone for modern architecture in the Denver scene. Translated from the Latin, the firm's name bridges the notions of Studio (to study, to pursue eagerly) and completiva (to complete, to make whole). Principal architects Yong Cho and Catherine Mercer have participated in projects ranging from residential and commercial to public and educational, including the Korean Reunification Monument; the Jadis Wine Bar in New York; and the Art House-adjacent Monarch Mills, comprised of 69 loft units.

The Art House Townhomes offered the firm an opportunity to play with the bricks-and-mortar vernacular of much of Denver architecture, while extending the language in terms of design and materials. "We replicated the idea of masonry," says Mr. Yong, "but pushed the sense of design to be lighter, more open." They also wanted to reflect an international model of neighborhood design, in which small alleyways and "incremental design" yield an evolved sense of space and urban density. Incremental design refers to the notion of building a development from scratch as if it had been built over time. Says Mr. Yong, "The townhomes are broken up into different styles within the plan in an effort to create a rich urban site," which lends the development a feeling of historical development.

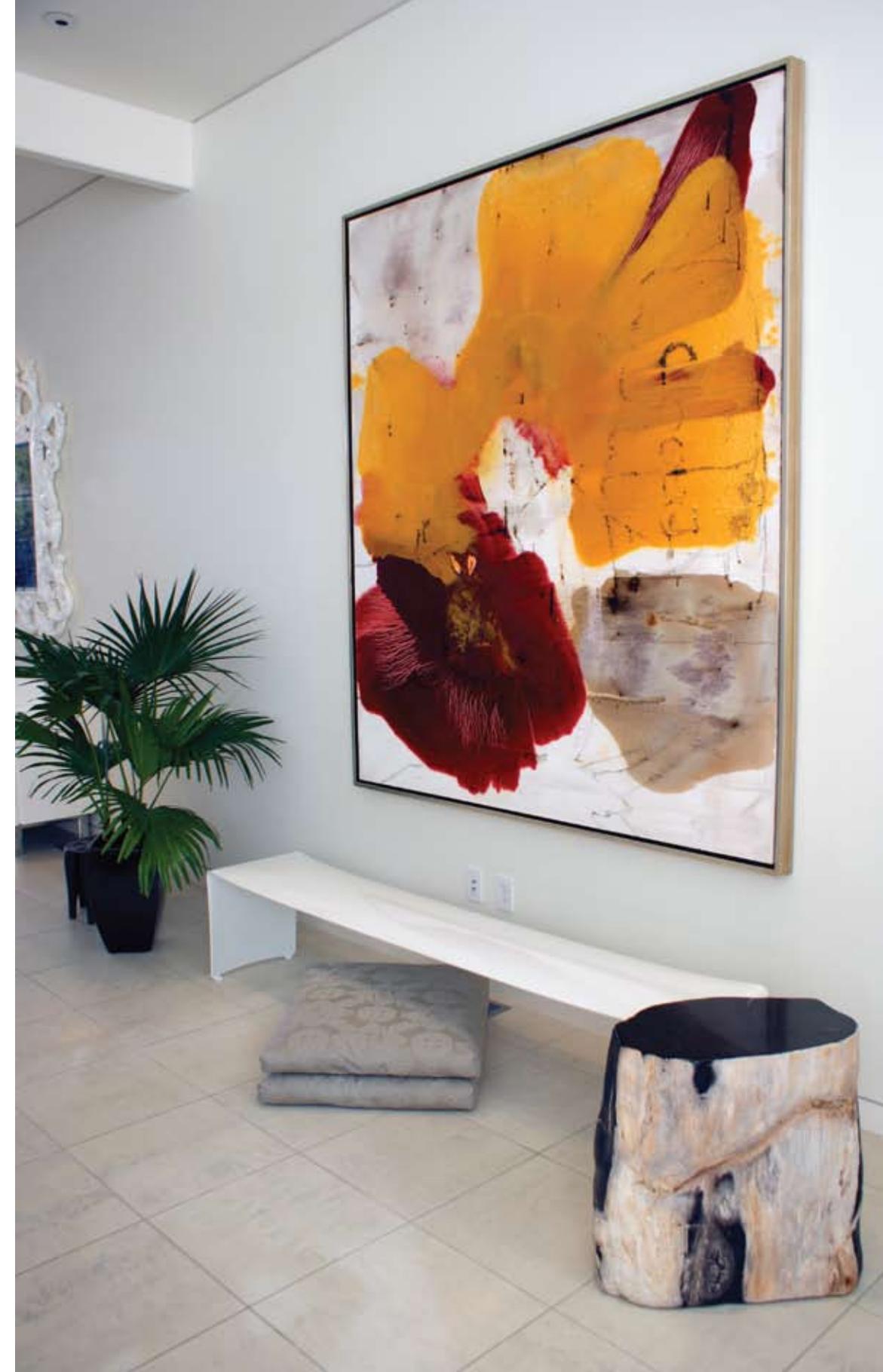
The Art House's refined finishes are evident in every detail, from the floating interior baseboards to the exterior's "rain screen system," in which a glass skin floats inches from the exterior of the buildings. As part of the firm's LEED efforts, the skin whisks water down and away, while flushing hot air up and out. Studio Completiva received an Architects Choice award for their work on the Art House Townhomes in 2006-2007.



Above: The team salvaged brick from old buildings to match the dimensions of the brick used in the home's original construction. Because it was going to be painted, it didn't matter what color it was.

Next door are the three largest and most majestic Art House townhomes, those with a Delgany exposure, which place the development's best foot forward to passers-by on 15th street and Delgany. These residences are as fluent a translation of modern architecture as is spoken in Denver. Each unit shares an exterior cladding of glass curtain walls on contemporary metal frames, and unusual, semi-transparent sunscreens (see inset). Each residence houses a married couple, each sits on the same footprint with the same square footage (3,700 square feet), and each is categorically opposed to the others in both style and substance. Viewed from outside, one might not expect such diversity within.

The home of Rebecca Kessler and Marti Groh resonates with a deeply refined elegance. A retired interior designer, Mrs. Kessler floats about her airy space like a Buddhist adept. The third floor acts as a kind of Zen cloud, with a dojo-like office space; a meditation room; and a yoga studio, equipped with what looks like a medieval torture device (actually a series of wall-mounted ropes for Iyengar yoga). The studio's main wall, which can bear the weight of multiple students, is reinforced



Inside the Kessler/Groh residence, the sense of serenity and lightness is palpable. Call it positive chi (a secretive feng-shui designer was consulted during the build-out) or call it the easy grace of true affluence, but while spending time here, one can't help but experience a kind of spiritual bath. Mrs. Kessler rises early, drinks hot tea from a handmade cup, and writes calligraphy or meditates. A great student of world religions, she quotes the Sufi poet Rumi, who says, "Forty days of early mornings does for the soul what nine months in the womb do for a baby."

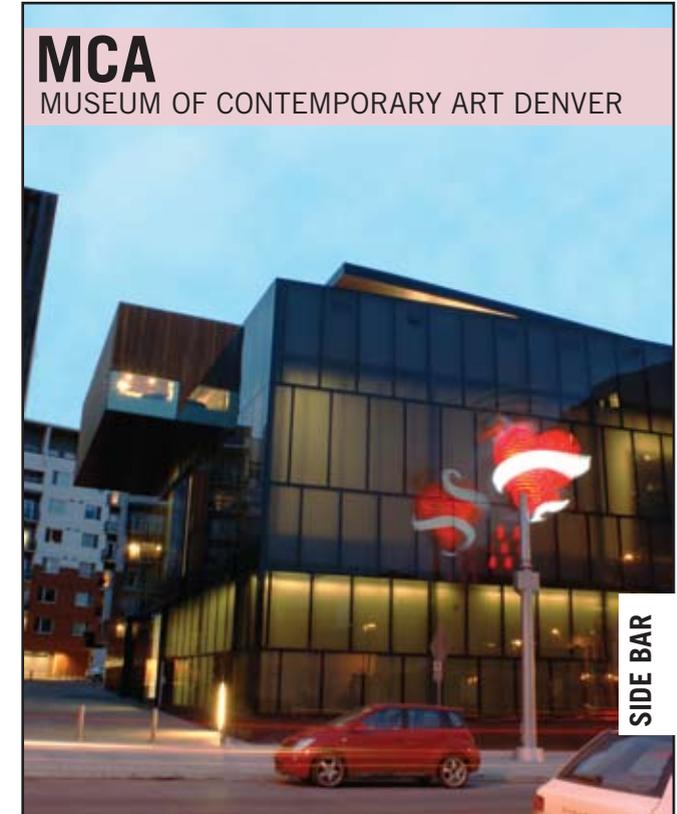
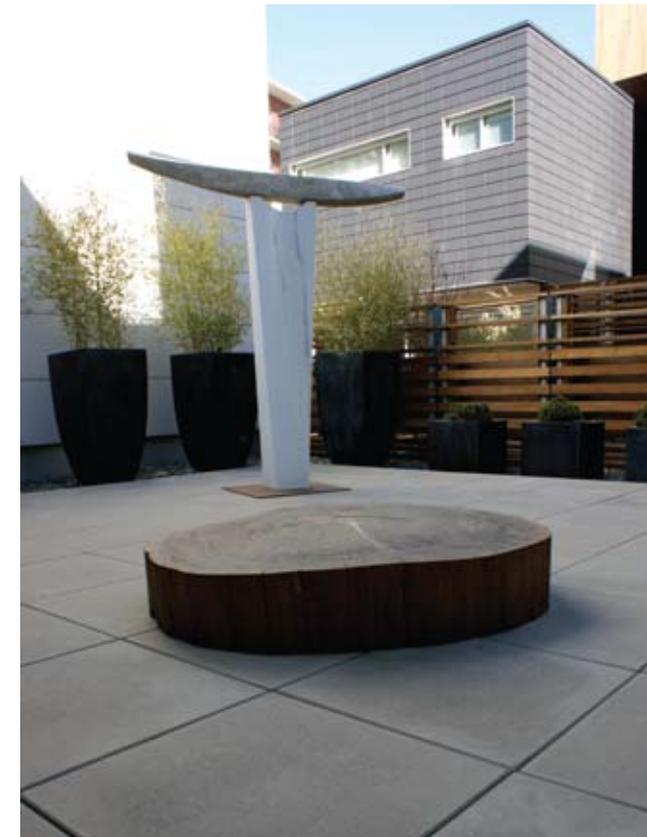
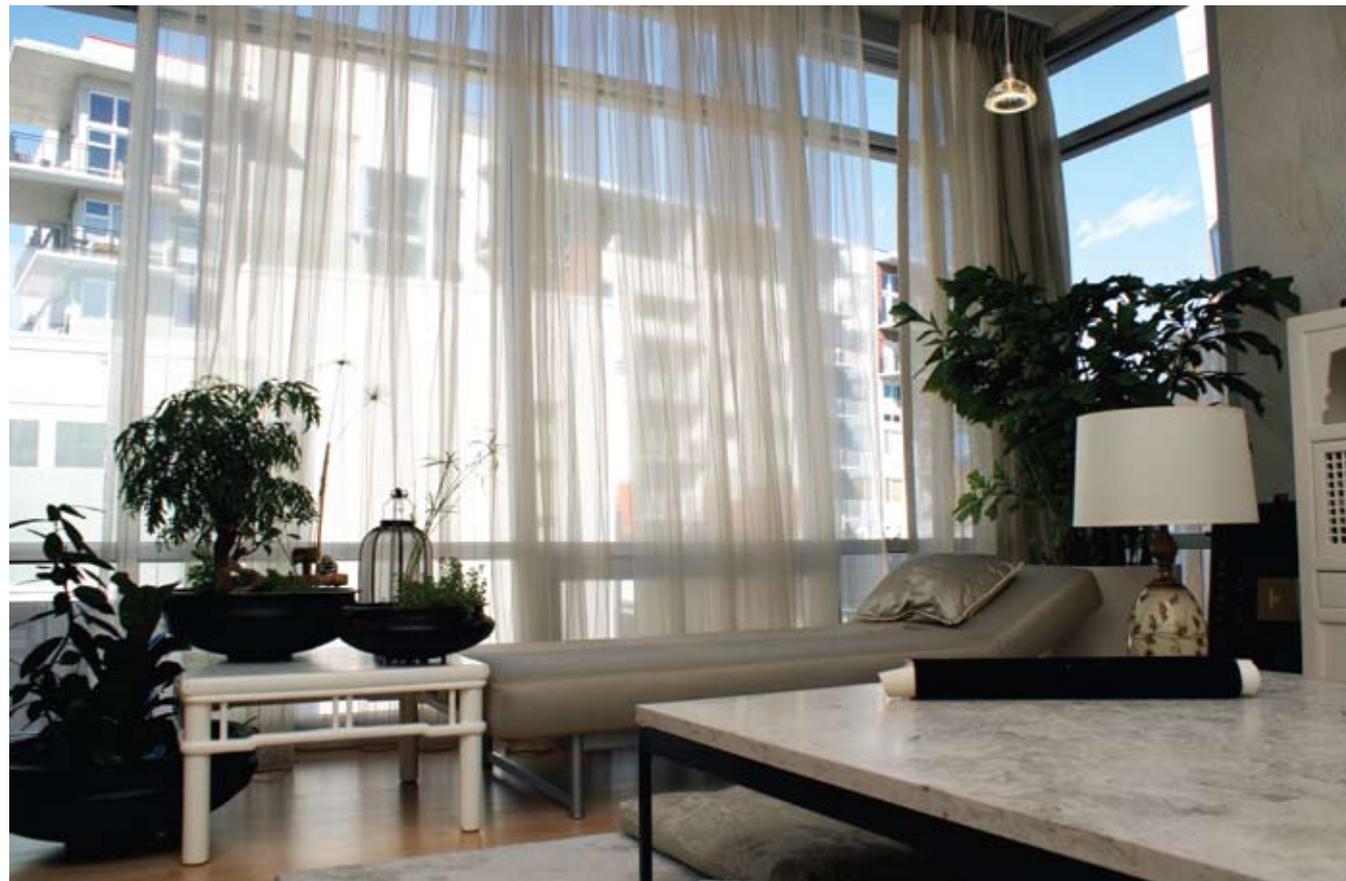
And it doesn't hurt that her own LoDo womb represents the height of contemporary design. The kitchen alone rivals many of the most rarefied spaces of New York, Florence, Paris. It

shares in common with the other units a supreme sleekness provided by Bulthaup, the German kitchen manufacturer that designs and produces bespoke systems for living spaces. Large drawers slide out silently and effortlessly, closing with intelligent certainty. Balthaup and Maax Collection cabinets are situated with ergonomic proximity to the deep sinks and prep spaces. An array of pristine appliances from Bosch, Dacor and Subzero include jumbo refrigeration units, dual steamers, multiple ovens and striking gas ranges with hoods.

Mrs. Kessler's husband Marti Groh, a sales manager in the telecommunications industry, travels with his wife often, as evidenced by their many African and Asian artworks.



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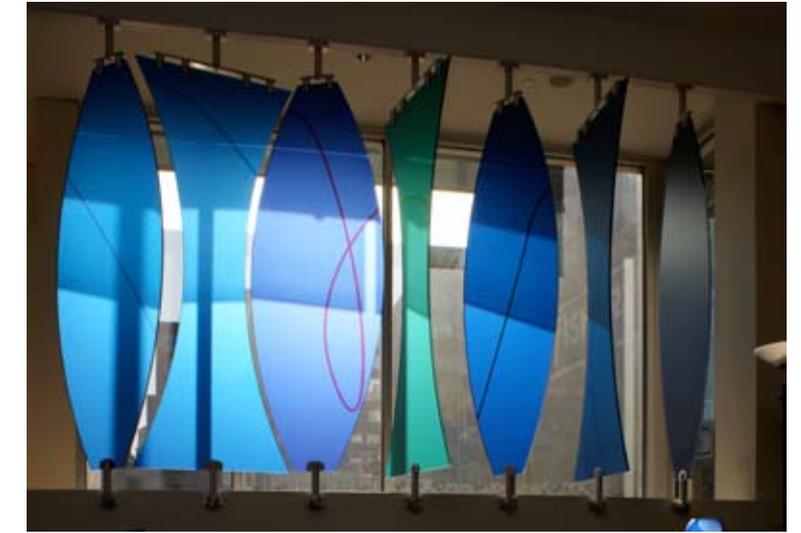


MCA
MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART DENVER

SIDE BAR

Designed by David Adjaye Associates (UK), the Denver Museum of Contemporary Art was the first Gold-LEED certified museum in the country. According to museum materials, MCA Denver used "20% recycled content, and over 50% of construction waste was recycled. Water use is minimized through low-flow fixtures and waterless urinals. Greenguard furniture in the public and private spaces is largely from Knoll, the first U.S. manufacture to utilize green practices. A radiant floor system heats the building and the galleries to offer moderated and even heating."

MCA refers to itself as "an activator, content provider and immediate research vehicle of culture in the making—a museum without a front door." Reminiscent of Zaha Hadid's Rosenthal Center for the Arts in Cincinnati, MCA Denver does indeed feel like an extension of the street world...sidewalks out front lead directly into the building, which houses five galleries: Photography, Paper Works, Large Works, New Media, and Projects. SHOP MCA, the museum's store, offers an array of exquisite small- and large-format books and other print materials, as well as T-shirts, CDs and tchotchkes. Museum-goers can recharge with a latte or mixed drink on the rooftop cafe, while enjoying lovely city views.



Above: The team salvaged brick from old buildings to match the dimensions of the brick used in the home's original construction. Because it was going to be painted, it didn't matter what color it was.

Next door down, and closest to the Cherry Creek River, is the home of Rob and Paula Grey, founders of DenverMoneyManager.com. On a recent afternoon the couple took a break from the office (literally a stone's throw across Delgany Street) to hold forth on life and money. These lifelong partners are a study in the unifying of opposites. Moving freely through the world of investment and finance, they're nonetheless free spirits whose favorite escape is a ride on their dueling Harley Davidson motorcycles. And with ample parking and storage underground (a rare downtown commodity), there's plenty of space for multiple vehicles. Their design sensibility runs to the fantastical, with bright primary colors and whimsical sculptures. Rotating blue panels spin above the entryway, creating a playful dance of light. The custom panels can be closed to mute direct sunlight through the unit's west-facing windows, or opened to let the light stream in.

When family comes to visit, the Greys' townhome becomes a three-story funhouse, with little ones barreling up, down and all around the home. When the grandkids were tots, it took extra vigilance to keep them from climbing the ladder-like stairway railings and diving down the vertiginous stairwell. (peering down from the third floor, one can't help being



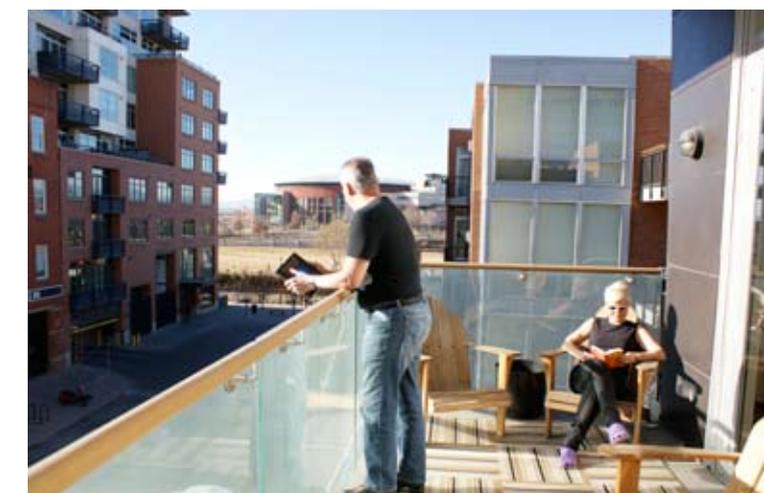
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reminded of the bell tower sequence in Alfred Hitchcock's "Vertigo," in which Jimmy Stewart's character suffers the eponymous affliction high above a wrap-around flight of stairs). The exquisitely designed master bath, adjacent to a large his-and-hers walk-in closet, employs Ann Sacks tile along with funky sculptural objects.

Their second-floor media room is a financial news addict's delight, with CNBC on blast and stock tickers on constant scroll. The room also has a well-appointed wet bar for entertaining, and a treasure chest full of kids' toys (Mrs. Grey insists it's for the grandkids). The Greys share a great affec-

tion for their next-door neighbors (Mrs. Kessler and Mr. Groh; and Dee Chirafisi and Jim Theye). She refers to the three couples as 'the three of us.' "We went on a week-long sailing trip with Dee and Jim," Mr. Grey says, "Becky's been a yoga instructor for me..."

In contrast to the playfulness of the Grey house and the please-remove-your-shoes elegance of the Kessler/Groh residence, Dee Chirafisi and Jim Theye's home glows with a cozy warmth. Mrs. Chirafisi jokes that it's the only place in town with "two dogs, a cat and five horses." The horses (strictly two-dimensional) are courtesy of local painter Don Coen; the



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dogs and cat are very much real, and enjoy basking in the attention of their owners and guests alike. During a recent living room conversation with a reporter Mr. Theye walked in and was immediately commandeered to take the dogs on the "poop loop." This is the nickname given a route by the river, along which residents are almost guaranteed to see friends, neighbors, and other frisky dogs.

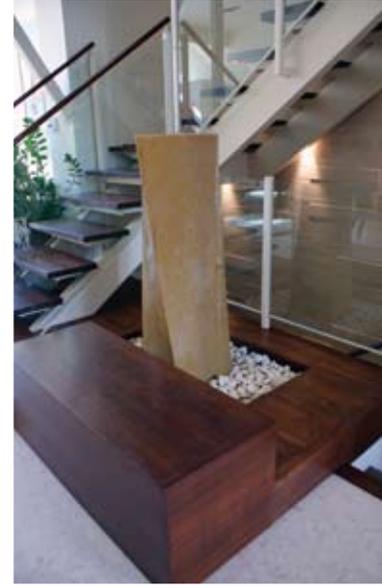
Mr. Theye, husband and business partner to Mrs. Chirafisi, exudes the relaxed warmth of a consummate host, and the couple entertain often. "I have a real attraction to modern architecture," Mrs. Chirafisi says, "which is one of the reasons we moved here. I like very minimal spaces and I love my art." Their collection includes large works from many local artists, as well as those from artists of international renown (an ex-



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NO LONGER MUST PARENTS CHOOSE FUNCTION OVER STYLE WHEN PLANNING SPACES FOR THEIR KIDS. HERE IS A SELECTION OF LO MODERN CHILDREN'S FURNISHINGS, CLOTHING, TOYS AND ACCESSORIES.



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THE NEIGHBORHOOD

A FEW SPOTS NEAR THE ARTHOUSE TOWNHOMES

PLUS GALLERY

1490 Delgany Street Denver, CO 80202 • 303.296.0927

[+plusgallery.com](#)

Formerly located in a storefront off Broadway and now directly across from MCA/Art House, Plus Gallery has become a lighthouse for progressive installations and excellent traditional shows.

Ink! Coffee Company

1590 Little Raven St #180 Denver, CO 80202 • 720.214.1111

[+plusgallery.com](#)

Situated across the street from the enormous Riverfront Park, Ink! Coffee Company offers a nice indoor-outdoor meeting or leisure spot, boasting a selection of hand-made sandwiches that rivals many lunch spots downtown.

SIDE BAR

Zengo

1610 Little Raven Street Denver, CO 80202 720.904.0965

[+modernmexican.com](#)

Zengo, Japanese for “give and take,” is an easy walk from Art House. In Zengo’s chi-chi atmosphere, one will find a Latin-Asian profusion of small and large plates, from ceviche to sushi, from soft-shell crab to arroz frito.

Sushi Sasa

2401 15th Street, Suite 80 Denver, CO 80202 • 303.433.7272

[+sushisadenver.com](#)

Voted Westword’s “Best Sushi Restaurant in Denver” for the past three years, Sushi Sasa matches the Art House in its refined minimalism and elegance. Gifted gringo chef Wayne Conwell corners the sushi market this side of South Pearl.

Tattered Cover Bookstore

1628 16th Street at Wynkoop • Denver, CO 80202 • 303.436.1070

[+tatteredcover.com](#)

This Denver indie institution has branches around Denver, but the LoDo location is the most authentic and rustic, with its exposed brick walls, reclaimed wood floors and enormous vaulted ceilings. Burrow in for a cup of tea and the Sunday New York Times.



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traordinary Christo lithograph graces the second floor landing). Their home emphasizes texture, wood and other natural materials, setting it apart from the other units.

Through Kentwood City Properties, Mrs. Chirafisi represents the Art House properties as broker, as well as the lion’s share of lofts in LoDo and the Denver Metro area, which she refers to as “city and city-close.” Kentwood was in on the development since the early planning stages. “I remember when it was a drawing—literally—of the site plan, and meeting with Mark Falcone and the architects, talking about ‘what do people want?’” Since that early vision, the master plan that in-

cludes the museum, Falcone/Bruss residence, and Art House Townhomes has blossomed into a block with a strong vision and sense of identity. “We were here before the museum. We watched this corner go from not having a sense of place to having one of the strongest senses of place down here.” And she has been involved with each person who has moved in among the 13 Art House units since. “I’ve helped create a space not just for myself and my family, but where there’s a lot of people I know who are very happy.” It’s not hard to imagine why.

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