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Another kind of pod casting. PAGE 4



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INNER LIFE

The 1930 Eastern Columbia building downtown triumphantly reopens as lofts. Its landmark tower has regained its glory, but what have residents done inside? Tag along for a tour. *Page 10*

Deco diva reborn

RICARDO DEARATANHA *Los Angeles Times*

DESIGN DISPATCH

The kitchen's hottest trends
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THE CALIFORNIA GARDEN

He's Oprah's go-to guy
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FIRST PERSON

Face to face with flames
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INNER LIFE

One landmark, four visions

RORY CUNNINGHAM, president of the Art Deco Society of L.A., called it one of the premier Deco buildings in the country. Revered historian Robert Winter said it's a shining example of Southern California's golden age of architecture. Times critic Christopher Hawthorne recently declared it "one of the most beautiful pieces of architecture in the city, a building that would be world-famous if it were located in Manhattan or San Francisco." To about 100 Angelenos, however, the Eastern Columbia building is even more. It's home. After two years and a reported \$80-million renovation, the Kor Group has reopened the historic retail and office tower as 147 lofts. Original terra cotta tiles — a mix of sea-foam green and cerulean blue that a 1930 Times story characterized as "melting turquoise" — have been restored. The terrazzo floor of the building's old shopping arcade has been painstakingly repaired for a new Kelly Wearstler-designed lobby. But what are all those newly minted urbanites doing with their lofts? We peeked into four units, all owned by first-time home buyers who are taking dramatically different approaches to their interiors. Whether Deco or Zen, modern or traditional, all four spaces reflect the joys — and the challenges — of living in a landmark.

— NANCY YOSHIHARA AND CRAIG NAKANO



MODERN: Geoff Clark's choices include a Starck chair, below, with a funky lamp.

Photographs by RICARDO DEARATANHA *Los Angeles Times*

Bright, sleek and spare: a cool vibe that complements an ornate exterior

GEOFF CLARK'S pad plays out like an ode to every romantic notion of what loft living can be: open, airy, distinctly modern and very, very cool.

The ceiling and walls — originally a fickle putty color that leaned toward green, gray or brown depending on the light — now glow a crisp, clean white. Windows wrapping the corner unit allow the sun to flood in, bouncing off the floor and turning the condo into a 1,390-square-foot light box that seems to float above Broadway.

"I just wanted a very cool, tranquil space," Clark says to the electro-lounge beats of Thievery Corporation on his sound system. "The building is so ornate, I didn't want an ornate unit. I wanted a neutral interior that complemented the exterior. I wanted that classic loft feel."

Indeed, Clark's mix of modern and vintage

seems right at home on the sleek concrete floor. Two low-slung B&B Italia Metropolitan armchairs complement a classic Warren Platner coffee table that he scored from a Palm Springs consignment shop. Contemporary pieces such as Kartell's translucent Bourgie lamp and a Philippe Starck-designed Mademoiselle chair with transparent legs blend seamlessly with a funky red floor lamp and cast-concrete cactus planter. A wall sculpture made of rusted railroad spikes seems appropriately industrial and refined at the same time.

The vibe is young yet grown-up, classic but not cliché. The decor, much like the building itself, gives a nod to the past but lives in the present. It's the kind of space that feels perpetually primed for a cocktail party, though Clark says no parties — not yet. "Just a few Friday-drinks-at-the-pool kind of deal," he says with a smile.



Before he moved from Laurel Canyon, he says, "One thing people said to me was, 'No one is going to see you.' But it's like I have a waiting list. Now friends want to come downtown."

From his perch on the seventh floor, the long-time architecture buff can see the landmark marquee of the 1926 Orpheum Theatre, not to mention the other facades of downtown's historic core. "I can just sit and look at these buildings forever," he says, waving his finger toward Broadway from a blue sofa pushed up to the windows.

Clark considered buying a condo in West Hollywood but decided the Eastern Columbia would deliver something special, "a sense of excitement every time you walk in the door."

Turns out he doesn't even need to do that. On the drive home from work, eventually that blue and gold clock tower always pops into view. "I'll see it and think, 'Oh, my God. I live there.'"



ZEN: Nichol Bradford personalized her 10th-floor aerie with a mirrored daybed and 12-foot ficus. The salvaged oak door will become a dining table.

Her taste runs to silk and chocolate

IF there can be such a thing as a glam Zen retreat, Nichol Bradford has tried to create it. As she lounges on a mirrored daybed, the scent of incense and calming music from the Bodhi Tree Bookstore fill the air. Beneath her feet is her ultimate vision of nirvana: a chocolate-hued concrete floor, color-matched to a Hershey's bar. "It looks like a fudge cake," Bradford says. "I love it."

The condo's exposed ventilation duct, all-stainless kitchen cabinetry and other elements of industrial chic have been softened by simple touches: the delicate lines of cut calla lilies from the wholesale flower market a few blocks away, the billowy lengths of golden silk draped here and there, even the late afternoon sun that showers the bedroom with saffron light.

"I love modern, but I don't think I could do it and it not feel like a guy's place," she says.

Her parakeets — Millet, Bella and Squeak — seem just as content in their new home, a cage with views of downtown's skyscrapers.

Bradford, who devises corporate strategy for a video game company, was renting in Hollywood before moving to the Eastern Columbia. Like many of her neighbors, she bought her unit sight unseen, before construction was completed, driven purely by "faith and intuition."

Though she was drawn to the building's Zig-zag Moderne style of Deco, she hasn't felt confined by it.

Whereas some neighbors have hung period-correct wallpaper and light fixtures, Bradford invested her time wrangling a 12-foot ficus to the 10th floor, where its canopy adds a glimpse of nature in a most unexpected setting.

She says a 9-foot-tall oak door salvaged from the old Getty Villa will be turned into a dining table, and still-to-be-hung graphic prints will chronicle Africans living outside Africa in the era before slavery.

It all makes for a style that Bradford struggles to define at first, but then she settles on a fitting label: "my genie bottle."



TRADITIONAL: "Home in downtown has to be soothing because it is your sanctuary," says Paul Gonzalez, playing his mother's piano, which she received in 1942.

Designed around his baby — grand

PAUL GONZALEZ is in a bit of a design quandary.

He's not happy with his new couch — neither the Easter egg blue color nor the Naugahyde covering he specially selected for his cat, Cleo, who rarely sits on the thing. "This couch would have been perfect in the Jetsons' house," quips Gonzalez, who spent last weekend arranging to have it reupholstered in a latte-colored fabric.

Describing his second-floor studio as a work in progress, Gonzalez says he drew on the building's interior public spaces, designed by Kelly Wearstler, for inspiration. "Many of my loft's interior design choices were taken from the lobby of the building. I wanted my loft to flow from the lobby and interior of the building."

Venetian plaster lines the entryway, where the interior doorway is framed in black marble. The charcoal gray of the concrete floor is the same shade as part of the lobby floor.

Gonzalez consulted with four interior designers, but the inspiration for his traditional furniture came from his mother. The Steinway & Sons baby grand piano that she received as a birthday

present in 1942 now graces his loft.

"When I was a kid, the piano was always in the house," he says. "I love the color of the wood and curves of the piano. Everything is built around the piano."

A clothes-filled, mahogany, Ralph Lauren armoire, crucial in a space with no closets, stands to one side of the piano near his sleigh bed from Henredon. Across the way is another armoire, by Ethan Allen, that hides his computer. Near his kitchen is a round table that he found at Interior Devine in Pasadena.

Gonzalez is mixing these traditional pieces with modern bar stools, lighting fixtures and art. He calls his style "casual sophisticate." Canvases by New Orleans painter David Harouni line the wall adjacent to windows that look into the tree-tops on 9th Street — a welcome bit of green for a man who rented in leafy Pasadena for 20 years. He uses the building's up-lights outside his windows as planters.

"Home in downtown has to be soothing because it is your sanctuary," says Gonzalez, who walks three blocks to his office at AT&T. "This where you restore, reenergize."

Not scary; just a refined sense of Deco irreverence

IT'S fitting that horror film director Jeremy Kasten's unit feels a bit like a movie set: an elegant Art Deco smoking lounge circa 1930, the mohair-upholstered sofa set under the gaze of a mounted deer and a pronghorn.

Gold chevrons shimmer off the Bradbury & Bradbury Art Wallpaper under the chair rail. Wood floors reflect the soft light cast from vintage lamps.

"This is a more dialed down and mature look for me," says Kasten, whose new movie, "The Thirst," was released this week on DVD.

Dressed in a blue blazer with a white pocket square, the self-described Deco fanatic says he took his design cues from the historic building. He sees Deco as man and nature merged. "It's delicate and very masculine at the same time."

It's also an era that works well with Kasten's eclectic antiques collection displayed throughout his one-bedroom, 880-square-foot unit on the mezzanine, which originally was part of the building's retail arcade. He wanted to recapture that arcade feeling with the ambience of an old-fashioned store.

In just 16 days, Kasten and interior designer Shannon Ggem, totally transformed the unit, which has only two windows.

"Most people want lots of windows," Kasten says. "For me, I just want walls — lots of wall space." That gives him more places to mount his collection of artwork originally made for the covers of pulp novels. "Most of the things I had but never thought they could come together."

Their biggest design challenge was the low structural crossbeam between the kitchen and living area. The solution: hang an old jeweler's sign that Kasten bought for \$50 from the back of an antiques shop in New Orleans when he was 21 and driving to L.A. from Baltimore.

The Deco sofa and two matching chairs were maroon when Kasten received them from a friend, then were reupholstered in crème and black mohair. Matching lamps came from opposite coasts: a New York flea market and a yard sale in the California desert. A chest with a mirrored pullout bar was a gift from his mother.

In the kitchen, Ggem replaced the developer's standard kitchen pendant with a Deco-esque fixture purchased at an estate sale. To add a little more period flavor without much added expense, Kasten painted a chevron pattern on the bathroom floor and gold detailing on the ceramic tile above the living-room windows.

Backless, custom shelves create a beehive-shaped entrance from the kitchen to the bedroom, where 300 vintage ties are displayed as wall decor. Placed carefully on the shelves: antique "Wizard of Oz" books, ruby slippers, 1930s nude female figurines collected from around the world, kitschy taxidermy and books whose spines sport titles such as "Eaten Alive: Italian Cannibal and Zombie Movies" and "Mr. T on Mr. T."

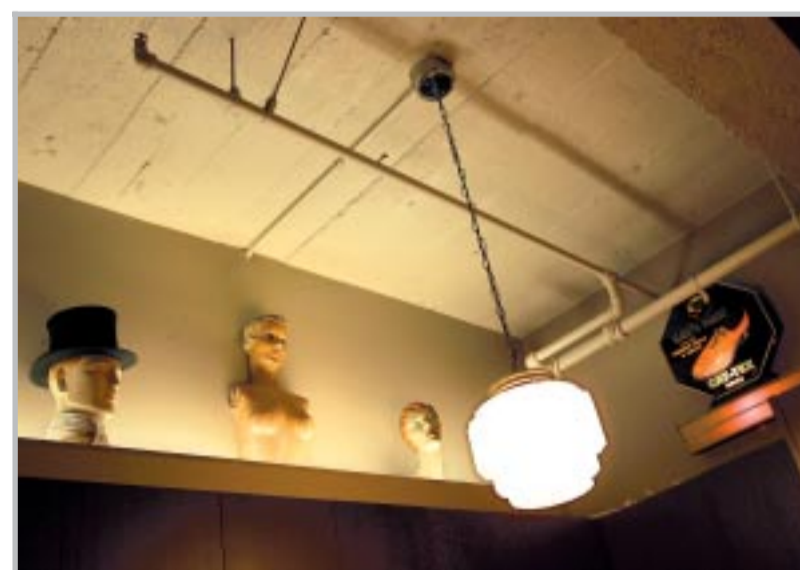
Kasten has long admired the Eastern Columbia, and his decorative mementos include vintage postcards of the building framed and hung in the kitchen. He turned a 1931 coin commemorating the building into his keychain. All were bought on EBay. "There's a mapable history to this place," says Kasten, who moved from Venice with his 28-pound cat, Flipper.

During the decorating process, his instinct was to fill the space with his abundant tchotchkes. Ggem, ever the diplomat, would politely suggest, "Let's just try this in the storage unit for a while."

Kasten says his housewarming party three weeks ago was the first time he's ever been nervous that someone would break something. But all went off just fine. His guests even helped to clean up. What did his friends think of his new pad? "Everyone said it's so me."



Photographs by RICARDO DEARATANHA *Los Angeles Times*



VINTAGE, BABY: Jeremy Kasten, top, whose unit was once part of the building's retail arcade, said he transformed it to recapture a vintage ambience that works well with his antiques collection. At left, 300 vintage ties are displayed as wall décor. He swapped out an industrial pendant light for a vintage find.

More photos at latimes.com

Look to the Home section online for an expanded photo gallery of the renovated Eastern Columbia building, including additional pictures of these four lofts, the historic clock tower and the Kelly Wearstler-designed rooftop pool and lobby. Go to latimes.com/easterncolumbia.