

TWO OF ARTS



How a pair of art aficionados turned a downtown loft into a comfortable live-in gallery

By Alison Garwood-Jones
Interior styling by Jane Hardin

When Paul Bain and Isa Spalding decided to combine their lives six years ago it took some hunting to find a place with enough light and wall space to showcase their collections: Bain's black-and-white portraits and neon signs and Spalding's large-scale paintings. "Art brought us together," says Spalding, an art advisor, who met Bain, an arts and entertainment lawyer, at a gallery she once ran.

Then the couple found a two-bedroom, three-level loft in a former garment factory on the edge of downtown's Fashion District. "An actual loft, not a condo masquerading as a loft," adds Bain. Its southern-exposed windows, steel joists and 5.4-metre-high ceiling were all retained from the original building which was converted in the mid-1990s. >



↑ From the front door, all three levels of the loft can be seen. An aluminum painting of a race car track by Christian Eckart hangs at the base of the stairs.



↗ In the dining area is a marble-top Saarinen table with Cherner chairs, all from Quasi Modo. A screenprint by Ed Ruscha is propped on a picture ledge.



↗↗ A poured concrete vanity was custom-made for the cramped first floor bathroom. Underneath is a giant plaster pill by Colleen Wolstenholme.

For Bain and Spalding, an artful lifestyle is about indulging their own irrepressible *joie de vivre*. As you enter the front door, painted Kelly green on the inside, it's clear art abounds on every surface. Unexpected hits of colour continue as you look up to the upper levels and the ceiling where a series of skylights, with each well painted a different hue, add streams of coloured light to the third storey.

When the couple first viewed the space their eyes narrowed at the sight of an Odeon-sized projection screen taking up most of the west wall of the ground floor. They kept it, for showing videos during parties, but most of the time it's covered with an enormous abstract painting by Spalding's father, artist/curator Jeffrey Spalding. A Paul Smith area rug, with its centripetal swirl of colour, pulls the room's eclectic mix of mid-century modern furniture and newer items together. "I like furniture that's classic and clean," says Bain, pointing to the pieces in the rug's orbit. "And orange," Spalding adds, a nod to Bain's much-loved sofa underneath the stairs, a leftover from his "pre-Isa" days.

The couple plans to redo the original floors and, eventually, the kitchen. "We keep redesigning it in our minds," says Bain. But more pressing was the demolition of the fireplace, with its faux turquoise stone in a turtle shell pattern. They replaced it with a concrete block surround. In the awkwardly shaped, first floor bathroom they installed a poured concrete vanity. "We made it triangular so that, when you enter, you can actually get in without running into a sink," says Spalding.

Upstairs, a custom-made bed in the bedroom features built-in drawers and a high headboard that conceals a walk-in closet with entries on both sides. Spalding stores more paintings than clothes here and Bain's shoes threaten to take over any day now. It's the one spot in the home that could use a little curatorial attention. ■

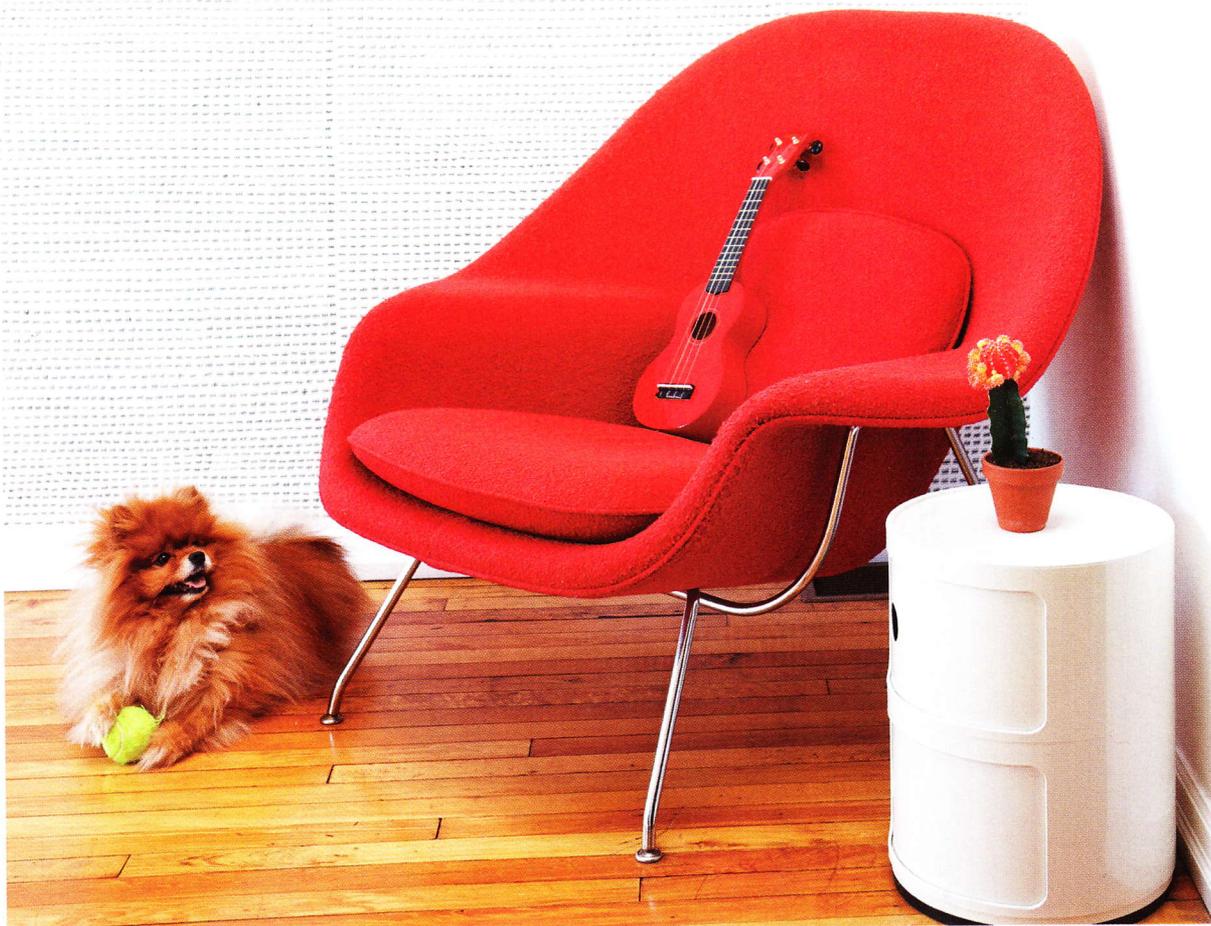


The bookcase contains a number of artworks including a talking stick by Douglas Coupland (centre) and Science & Son's ceramic Phonophone. Neon sculpture by Kelly Mark.

Art work by Hank Willis Thomas sits on the mantel with a dreamcatcher, made from a basketball hoop, by Charles Goldman above it. A painting by Jeffrey Spalding covers a projection screen on the wall. The Paul Smith rug is from Avenue Road, leather cubes are from Nienkämper and the George Nelson Saucer pendant is available at Design Within Reach.



Kelly Mark's 12345 wallpaper, with its tight rows of tally marks, was the perfect choice for the upstairs office. Womb chair available at Design Within Reach; the Kartell side table can be found at Quasi Modo.





↑ Steel beams reinforce the two upper floors and open-webbed steel joists support the stairs. Bain's collection of photos includes a portrait of Marshall McLuhan by John Reeves and a self-portrait of artist/activist Freda Guttman.

→ Kartell's Lovely Rita bookshelves, from Quasi Modo, cover one wall of Bain's office.
 → A custom-made bed frame doubles as a room divider. Behind is a walk-in closet and above, a light well painted green.

