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L.A. MART TAKES LOFTY APPROACH

National Designers Get a Glimpse of Downtown's Urban Lifestyle

by Kathryn Maese

The first thing visitors noticed last Wednesday as they stepped off the elevator at the L.A. Mart was the glowing blue lights and a sculpture resembling a whale's ribcage hanging over a hot tub.

Inside the loungy 1,200-square-foot space, designers from across the country were getting an up close look at L.A. loft living, or at least one Downtown resident's take on the concept.

As part of last week's L.A. Mart Design Center's NeoCon West conference, which offered industry professionals a sneak peek at the latest interior trends, this year's "case study" was inspired by the growth of Downtown's loft community and its impact on home, style and design.

Downtown resident and designer Joey Shimoda, whose Shimoda Design Group occupies a studio and loft in the Arts District, said he was asked to interpret the contemporary live-work lifestyle for the next generation of loft dwellers, one that moves beyond the exposed-ducts-and-concrete loft concept.

"When we started this project we asked, 'What is a Downtown loft like now?'" Shimoda said. "They are buildings that are largely going to be market-driven, so in many cases they are compartmentalized boxes. In the Toy Factory Lofts, for example, they are very narrow and not that tall. This was an interpretation of the essence of a loft."

Shimoda said the rectangular space blurs the line between what's private and what's public. The hot tub, for example, sits only a few feet from the computer workstation, while the living space blends



At the L.A. Mart's "Fine Living: The Loft Life" event last week, designers toured a model loft inspired by Downtown's current residential boom. The space was designed by Shimoda Design Group, based in the Arts District. Photo courtesy of L.A. Mart.

LANDMARKS

seamlessly into the kitchen and dining room. A \$25,000 stainless steel Bulthaup kitchen with a Sub Zero refrigerator is built on wheels for mobility and flexibility.

DEVELOPMENT

A sliding platform above the living space brings the 14-foot ceilings down to a more intimate level, and also doubles as a sleeping area. A glass-enclosed bathroom is open to the rest of the space. The room's blue hue was also a creative challenge for Shimoda's team.

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A panel about the loft featured Shimoda, Jesse Brink, *LA Architect* magazine's editor in chief, chef Susan Feniger of Ciudad, and Chris Tosdevin, design director for Bulthaup, who discussed how Downtown Los Angeles' redevelopment has helped popularize the concept of the live/work lifestyle. "There is a merging of contract and residential design," Shimoda said.

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