

SMALL SPACES

Loft dwellers have high expectations for stylish furnishings

By Christine Brun, Special to Residences

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Over the last decade, interior designer Hannah Lee and her architect husband, Clarence Chiang Jr., have completed dozens of projects in Hong Kong. Because apartments in that city are notoriously tiny, their work is instructional for anyone living in a small space.

I ran into examples of their entertainment-room solutions and furniture designs for small environments at NeoCon West, held at the Los Angeles Mart recently. Some of their solutions, for example, addressed the fact that in Hong Kong, it's not considered good feng shui to display a television set in the living room.

"It's both visually unappealing and undesirable," said Lee.

Her designs combine traditional and contemporary Western and Chinese elements to solve this problem in situations where the living room is the only area with space for a set. Together with her husband, she formulated panels that reflect the ancient Chinese custom of blending wood with ivory, which is in the center of the panels; they serve as a screen when the set isn't in use. The panels begin at \$6,000. Visit www.teamhc.com to see more of their work.

The design challenge showcased at L.A. Mart's "Fine Living: The Loft Life," was a case-study installation that interprets the contemporary live/work lifestyle of today's urban loft dweller as expressed by downtown Los Angeles' emerging loft phenomenon.

Los Angeles-based Shimoda Design Group designed a space dedicated to living, dining/kitchen, bath and sleeping; it serves as a testament to a contemporary lifestyle. A cross-section of design professionals and manufacturers collaborated to present new insights and concepts to the design community.

Other great products and furnishing ideas were also displayed at this year's market. A variety of companies joined presenting sponsor Bulthaup Kitchen Architecture to create an environment dedicated to living/working, dining/kitchen, bath and sleeping.

Loft spaces often have high ceilings, but, when divided, they present the same challenges of other small living spaces. In the photo here are kitchen "furniture" pieces presented by Bulthaup that were used at the show in a mock-up of a loft apartment.

"This limited-space project was perfect for Bulthaup," said Chris Tosdevin, director of West Coast sales for Bulthaup Los Angeles. "It's a prime example of how good design and good quality can be symbiotic, regardless of size or situation. Bulthaup is familiar with the challenges of limited-space design in contemporary architecture, whether residential or commercial, because we are a European company."

The mock-up loft unit used Bulthaup System 20 free-standing mobile pieces, which are ideal for a small project because they are made with the ideas of a transitory client in mind. This is for cooks who want to invest in high-quality items but who don't want to have to leave them behind when they move. You can see more of the designs at www.bulthaup.com

It is common in Europe to own the kitchen cabinets. The concept of modular kitchens first came to the United States in the 1970s and has grown since then in popularity.

"The idea of a loft is really an attitude about how one desires to live; it becomes a choice," said Joey Shimoda, principal of Shimoda Design Group. "This version of the loft life is an effort to maximize the experience of living in downtown Los Angeles." Shimoda sees the essence of loft life as a blur between activities — a seamless use of space for multiple purposes. And observing the loft experience is a perfect way to glean design ideas for any small home.

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