

Christine Brun, ASID, is a San Diego-based interior designer. Send questions and comments to her by e-mail at cbaintdes@hotmail.com or to Copley News Service, P.O. Box 120190, San Diego, CA 92112

SMALL SPACES CHRISTINE BRUN **Lofts inspire some stylish solutions**

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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 very 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, and serve as a screen when the set isn't in use. The panels begin at \$6,000. To see more of their work, visit www.teamhc.com.

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, serving 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 state-of-the-art products and furnishing ideas were also displayed at this year's market. Armani Casa, Artemide, Brayton Internationals, InterfaceFLOR, Maharam, Nova Studio, Sharpe Interior Systems, Steelcase, Toto and Vetro Mosaico 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 shown 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. It's a prime example of how good design and good quality can be symbiotic, regardless of size or situation," said Chris Tosdevin, director of West Coast sales, Bulthaup Los Angeles. "Bulthaup is familiar with the challenges of limited-space design in contemporary architecture, whether residential or commercial, since we are a European company, after all. Applying good design to the interior architecture of a small space can produce very cutting-edge designs."

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. It's for cooks who want to invest in high-quality items but don't want to have to leave them behind when they move. You can see more of their 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, Shimoda Design Group. "This version of the loft life is an effort to maximize the experience of living in downtown Los Angeles. Our interest is in the creation of architecture within a tight configuration of space. How does one take a typical 'shoe box' footprint and make it a meaningful architectural and living experience?"

He 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 get design ideas for any small home.



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These practical free-standing kitchen pieces make good design sense for people who live in lofts or apartments and may eventually want to move.