

KENNETH BROWN LOFT

For unit #714, designer Kenneth Brown set out to boldly go where few lofts have gone before. The result? An elegant exploration of the “softer side” of urban living. ¶ “I wanted to show the space doesn’t have to look like a typical loft,” says Brown, an L.A. designer who hosts the popular HGTV series *reDesign*. “You can personalize it. It can look like anything—even a house. I wanted to prove you can break the rules.” ¶ To achieve the look, he relied almost exclusively on products and materials from the showroom at Downtown’s L.A. Mart Design Center. His mission was to use the center as a one-stop shopping source. “Getting everything from the same place is always a challenge. But the great thing is L.A. Mart Design Center has such a variety—a lot of modern and a lot of traditional. It’s accessible and it’s good design.” ¶ He also created a fictitious client to live in the space: bachelor Christian Knightly, who was developed to represent L.A.’s new urban dweller—a young, moneyed, and highly educated power-broker. “I’m best known for being able to extract what a client wants and put it together so it fits their style,” Brown says. “One thing I always want to do is give a real sense of the person who lives in the space.” He pauses, then adds with a smile: “Creating a character made it fun. And it was great for me, because the client always said yes.” ¶ The Knightly character is London-born and of noble lineage. Brown imagined him as a motorcycle-riding rogue who has come to L.A. to pursue a career in the movie business. Thus, Knightly’s lair represents both his regal heritage and the modern sensibility of his new life as an Angeleno. “It’s a potpourri of different styles: new and old, L.A. and British, and how it melds together. It’s like the Queen Mother’s palace meets Downtown L.A.” ¶ Brown pictured Knightly on his custom Harley cruising

home to a retreat where he could relax in a space with a soft, enveloping palette. This was achieved through layering; Brown mixed textures, colors, and patterns, giving a rich, sophisticated aura to the bare loft’s industrial environment. ¶ The design took six weeks, in a process that included space planning, developing the character, developing the design concept, selecting the material, and then editing it down. “I take a lot away,” says Brown. “I bring in three or four times the amount of stuff I’ll ever use. It’s a two-week process. You’ve got to clear your head of it for a while, so you can walk back in and see it with fresh eyes.” ¶ Brown, who says he never designs room by room, started with the walls and was inspired to use dramatic and textured wallpaper. “The large-scale patterns I chose create visual movement and allow the eye to effortlessly flow through the space.” ¶ The designer has two lofts of his own in the L.A. area

and says they have served as a kind of a laboratory for experimenting with the limits of the loft. What has he learned? “You can go darker in a loft. This whole attitude that lofts have to be light and bright can work against you because then it just doesn’t always have the warmth of a home.” ¶ Brown first considered black wallpaper downstairs, but ended up using an oversized damask in an eggplant hue from U.K.-based Cole & Son collections from Kravet/Lee Jofa. “The eggplant works much better. It has the depth. It gives the room more of a British feel to it.” On the upstairs walls, he opted for an oversized paisley in a similar hue. ¶ To define rooms, Brown suspended Kravet fabric panels floor-to-ceiling. These can also be swept aside to create a more expansive space and let in more natural light. Each room was given a distinct personality and aesthetic, and further grounded with a mixture of furniture styles and textures. ¶ In the living room, a stately crystal chandelier and a cashmere Bogart custom sofa, both from the Wilton Cordrey Collection, suggest a traditional British influence that is confronted with a dose of L.A. cool by a pair of zebra-print occasional chairs from Lippman & Lippman Furniture Manufacturing. “Throwing in the chairs was the extra little zing for the room,” says Brown. ¶ A Garcia four-panel mirrored screen from Bernhardt reflects the urban landscape outside. Tartan curtains from Kravet frame the windows, giving a nod to Knightly’s ancestry while matching the pattern of the room-dividing drapery. The only remnant of the original loft is a bit of brick below the windows, a welcome touch of urban grittiness. Black and white photos with images of London by artist Julie Chytrowsky for Wall Kandy are grouped on the walls. “It’s all about carving out niches,” explains Brown. “I could easily see Christian

AN ELEGANT EXPLORATION OF THE “SOFTER SIDE” OF URBAN LIVING



Left page: Crystal chandelier by Wilton Cordrey Collection; Bogart custom sofa by Wilton Cordrey Collection; Photos with images of London by artist Julie Chytrowsky for Wall Kandy. Bottom right: Lippman & Lippman Furniture Manufacturing zebra-print occasional chairs; Framed art by Soicher-Marin Gallery.

sitting in that space on the sofa reading the New York Times.” ¶ A Martha Stewart Collection bar cart from Bernhardt by the window signals the Brit’s love of entertaining. It can be wheeled from room to room to satisfy the cocktail hour requests of guests jetting in for the weekend. “Knightly can make a mean martini,” Brown quips. ¶ In the dining area, he gestures to a Henredon gold leaf console with shelves from Filbert & Fig. It is set against the plaid drape. “One of the challenges with a loft is to figure out how to create additional storage because you don’t usually get a lot.” ¶ A round dining table from Century Designer Showroom invites guests to gather for a meal, as do the surrounding black tufted velvet chairs. The formal feeling they create is balanced by a mod and shiny Schonbeck jet-black crystal chandelier from Architectural

“YOU HAVE TO THINK NOT ONLY ABOUT THE SCALE OF OBJECTS IN THE ROOM, BUT ALSO THE SCALE OF THE ROOM AND SPACE ITSELF”

Lighting & Design. “It’s a modern version of something traditional. People love to see something they’re familiar with that has a twist.” ¶ Brown also stacked two large framed mirrors on a wall opposite the kitchen, in order to create a sense of symmetry that alludes to the formality he wanted in the room. Here, Brown offers a tip: “You always tilt the mirrors down when you work in a big space so that you’re not looking at ceiling. When you tilt them down you get a better reflection.” ¶ To evoke the feeling of a British gentleman’s smoking room, Brown mounted a ram’s head from Trebor/Neve’s on the wall. But—and here’s the modern twist, he explains—“Ours is silver leaf. I don’t like killing things.” ¶ Brown selected a lush slab of moss from The Tropics and set it on the stair landing to introduce a bit of nature into the urban setting. “You have all this concrete, so I thought this was a great installation of plant material. It’s actually just moss on plywood propped up against the wall.” ¶ Ascending the stairs to the second level, the mindset switches from nature to nurture. It is here that Brown wanted to explore how to create intimacy in a loft. He divided the space into master bedroom and home office, and separated them with a black-waxed linen drape. “It’s masculine, but it’s cozy. It’s great to have a huge bedroom, but then sometimes you want to scale it down. You have to think not only about the scale of objects in the room, but also the scale of the room and space itself.” ¶ The drape and the black mock croc headboard from the Wilton Cordrey Collec-

tion set the tone for the master suite. “How much more James Bond can you get? We thought that captured the charm and sexiness of the client.” ¶ The final touch was the faux mink throw atop the bed. “That’s the seduction part of it,” Brown says slyly. “Christian knows his girls like fur.” ¶ Although a desk from the Martha Stewart Collection at Bernhardt decked out with family photos is tucked in a corner away from the sleeping area, all work and no play makes Knightly... rather bored. That’s why Brown went all out on the terrace and gave him a putting green, complete with eco-friendly SoCal Synthetic Turf. “People think that when you own a city loft you don’t get a green area, so we installed the best artificial grass there is. It’s so hot, I love it. And he can practice his game all weekend and never have to leave.” When it’s time to take a break, there’s plenty of room to recline on a spa weave lounge shell from the Veneman Collection in Sunbrella fabric, or sip cocktails at JTA Diverse Furniture’s zen-like stone garden table wit cubed seats. ¶ Sometimes the best and most innovative ideas come from what Brown calls “happy accidents.” Such was the case with the upstairs bathroom. Originally he wanted the walls painted in a plaid pattern to echo the tartan curtains downstairs. Instead he noticed a different effect midway through the process—an imperfect green and white patchwork created by applying green paint on top of a pattern blocked out with painter’s tape. ¶ “They thought they had messed it up, but I said no. Sometimes it’s knowing when to stop. I think that’s exciting.” ¶ Post challenge, Brown sees lofts as more of a state of mind than an architectural style, citing films like Big and Ghost as catalysts for people identifying lofts as settings for a romantic and escapist lifestyle. ¶ “[Lofts] represent a sense of freedom. It’s breaking down barriers and I think that can be taken literally. You’re not living in a house that’s compartmentalized. You’re allowed to create your own lifestyle in an open space.”



Left: Filbert & Fig gold leaf console with shelves; Round dining table from Century Designer Showroom; Schonbeck onyx crystal chandelier from Architectural Lighting & Design; Large framed mirrors by Wilton Cordrey Collection; Custom Harley motorcycle. Below: Desk from Martha Stewart Collection at Bernhardt; Framed art by Soicher-Marin Gallery. Opposite page top right: Drape and mock croc headboard from the Wilton Cordrey Collection; Art on wall by Soicher-Marin Gallery. Opposite page bottom left: JTA Diverse Furniture table and chairs; SoCal Synthetic Turf / Forget Grass putting green.



CREDIT: T. CREDIT: T. CREDIT: T.



KENNETH BROWN

FOR KENNETH BROWN, AN OPEN MIND IS THE WAY TO GO. AND IT HELPS TO BRING ALONG AN IMAGINARY “FRIEND.”

I WAS DRAWN TO THIS PROJECT BECAUSE...
I LOVE OLDER BUILDINGS.

IF I COULD TAKE ONE ITEM FROM MY LOFT, IT WOULD BE...
THE OLD COPPER WINDOWS

IF I COULD STEAL ONE ITEM FROM ANOTHER LOFT, I WOULD TAKE...
I WOULD LIKE THE SCHONBECK JET-BLACK CRYSTAL CHANDELIER FROM ARCHITECTURAL LIGHTING & DESIGN

THE NEXT EVOLUTION IN LOFT DESIGN IS...
SINGLE FAMILY DETACHED RESIDENCES THAT HAVE LOFT-LIKE INTERIORS.