

INTERIOR DESIGN

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Designers On The Rise



Lofty Concept

Dufner Heighes rethinks a Manhattan apartment, from floorplan to fittings.





Opposite: Action figures become artwork in acrylic cases that Dufner Heighes designed and installed in the living room of a Manhattan apartment.

Above: Brushed-stainless chairs by Martin Visser, covered in red-orange wool in response to the owner's love of color, surround an e:15 oak table. The opening between the dining area and kitchen allows the apartment's owner to talk to guests while he cooks.

PHOTOGRAPHY: THOMAS LOOF, STUDIO Ø

"EXTREMELY 1980." Two words sum up the loft as architect Daniel Heighes Wismer first saw it. Glass-block walls bulged into the living area; mauve and gray dominated the color palette. In other words, virtually nothing had changed since the first owner converted the space to residential use 20 years before. Luckily for the independent investor who bought the place next, Wismer and his partner, Gregory Dufner, were up to the challenge. Wismer's retail experience, on the Jil Sander concept for Gabellini Associates and Coach and Le Sportsac stores for S. Russell Groves, had clarified his spatial sense and trained him to use organic materials to warm up rigorous lines. Dufner's expertise lay in furniture and fabrics. Together officially since 1999 as Dufner Heighes—the partners thought it just sounded better than Dufner Wismer—they've been gathering momentum and attracting attention for work as disparate as a cookbook →





prototype for a student at the French Culinary Institute and a modernist guest house in California.

From the start of the loft project, Wisner and Dufner knew the *Miami Vice* glass-block walls had to go, as did the long, narrow master suite behind them. These rooms, raised on a platform, originally ran parallel to the public areas, robbing them of half their potential width. Placing the master bedroom and bath in one of the apartment's front corners, near the only wall with windows, solved part of the problem but couldn't change one crucial fact: The 2,400-sq.-ft. layout stretched deep into the building, with the windows more than 50 ft. from the entryway. "When you walked in, everything was in front of you," Dufner says. It was an architectural case of tunnel vision.

Then came an epiphany. Move the entryway from the back to the side, and suddenly the apartment's entire orientation shifts 90 degrees. "It really activates you when you come into the space," Dufner says. From the foyer, sight lines fan out in three directions. The eye is constantly in motion, drawn left to the view, straight ahead to dining area and kitchen, or right to the study.

Dufner Heighes's careful placement of volumes within the space enhances the sense of movement and flow. Corners remain open. Forms evolve and interlock, with the same structure housing, for example, kitchen ovens on one side and audio components on the other. Instead of perfectly uniform flooring, the architects chose a Peruvian walnut for the visual rhythm of the grain, its warmth brought out by matte lacquer.

Meanwhile, they maintained sufficient definition for the owner, who grew up in a →

Left: Pillows from Troy enliven a Moroso sofa's sleek, low lines, which maintain the overall horizontality of the space.

traditional suburban house, to feel comfortable. Doors crept in as the project progressed, but they aren't disruptive. Frameless ceiling-height closet doors recede into the wall plane; pocket doors disappear. The kitchen is even equipped with barriers that slide out to keep the owner's bearded collies at bay, then slide away into the cabinetry.

Furnishings respond to the owner's love for color—and for plastic action figures, a rotating selection of which, housed in Dufner Heighes-designed acrylic cases, become installation art hung in the living area. Tomato-red wool covers dining chairs flanking a chunky oak table. "We used furniture with simple shapes, but oftentimes in wood or another material that's a little warmer, not stark, cold, lots-of-metal modern," Wismer says.

In the new master suite, Dufner Heighes designed key pieces including the bed, which takes up much of the floor space but manages not to overpower, thanks to squared-off lines and the lightness of the ash planks. A pair of wall-mounted bedside tables epitomize the firm's seamless touch and mastery of detail as they elaborate on the bed's profile, reinterpreted in pale green powder-coated steel. (These are the tables that were selected for *Interior Design's* 2001 Future Furniture juried exhibition.) Custom bed linens pick up on the shade, bringing it full circle.

The partners also designed the study's 12-ft-long desk, actually three separate sections that could fit in the building's small elevator. Similarly, walnut shelving at the room's rear comprises individual rectangular components. Behind them, the wall →

Below, left: The loopy lines of cubic tables painted by Jody Morelock contrast with the angularity of a David Weeks lamp.

Below, right: To create a good working environment in the kitchen, Dufner Heighes designed the light to fall evenly on the cast-concrete countertops, travertine floor, and ceruse-finished rift-cut oak cabinetry. (Elsewhere in the apartment, light pools for a floating effect.)

Opposite, top: Instead of selecting floorboards with perfectly even grain, the designers chose a Peruvian walnut for its sense of movement. The matte lacquer adds warmth.

Opposite, bottom: A wall of louvers separates the study, at the rear of the apartment, from the main living space. Dufner Heighes designed the desk and the shelving opposite. Straight ahead is the bar area, next to the kitchen.









- 1 ENTRY
- 2 POWDER ROOM
- 3 DINING
- 4 KITCHEN
- 5 LIVING
- 6 MASTER BEDROOM
- 7 DRESSING ROOM
- 8 MASTER BATH
- 9 STUDY
- 10 BAR
- 11 GUEST BATHROOM
- 12 GUEST BEDROOM
- 13 STORAGE

is painted a rich sienna, Dufner Heighes's modern take on that traditional staple, the oxblood-painted library.

Deciding how to separate the study from the main living space gave Dufner and Wismer the most pause. A wall would have violated code, since this corner of the apartment is windowless—besides, they wanted to let light through. Eventually, both glass and moving panels lost out to a louvered divider that technically qualifies as “furniture” rather than structure. And, again, attention to details makes itself apparent. The white louvers are fixed, angled down at the bottom and up at the top, with the shift taking place at a height of six ft., precisely the client’s eye level.

The divider, the last element to arrive on the job site, was a revelation even to Dufner and Wismer. “It’s completely opaque from outside—which is how we wanted it to be—but behind there’s so much light coming in,” Wismer says. And it really comes into its own in the soft glow of dusk: “At a dinner party, when the study’s lit,” Dufner points out, “the illumination through the louvers can be very soothing.” —Elena Kornbluth

Opposite: In the master suite, both the bed and bedside table are Dufner Heighes designs.

Below, left: Travertine walls and a cast-concrete sink interplay in the master bath.

Below, right: The cast-concrete sink in the powder room off the foyer is a miniature version.

SOFA: **MOROSO THROUGH FORMAT**. COCKTAIL TABLES: **JODY MORELOCK THROUGH TROY**. RUG: **AM COLLECTIONS**. FLOOR LAMP: **DAVID WEEKS THROUGH TROY**. DIAMOND CHAIR: **KNOLL**. ACRYLIC CASES: **JUST PLASTICS (FABRICATION)**. DINING TABLE: **E:15 THROUGH TROY**. CHAIRS: **MARTIN VISSER THROUGH TROY**. WALL OVEN: **DACOR**. BEDDING: **G-STYLE-LAB**. BATHROOM SINKS: **GET REAL SURFACES (FABRICATION)**. FAUCETS: **KROIN (MASTER BATH AND POWDER ROOM)**; **DORNBRACHT (KITCHEN AND BAR)**. LIGHTING CONSULTANT: **ALIS-TAIR WANDEFORDE-SMITH**.

