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The photo continues to show the living room's design. It features a mix of contemporary furniture, abstract art, and sleek modern lighting, and animals make the space warm with original terra-cotta wall tile. Opposite, left to right: Architectural details, such as arched windows, provide good bones for the loft—a glimpse of the Iowa State Capitol inspires the renovated building overlooks the Des Moines River.



lofty layers

Texture, pattern, art, and
collections mingle in a loft
that seamlessly celebrates
yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

By Jan Soultz Walker. Photographer: John Granen. Designer: Eric Kohler.





Left: The clean lines of the glass coffee table comfortably coexist with the simple styling of the traditional side table and subtle curves of the furnishings. Both tabletops invite arrangements of art, collections, and books that make the space warm and familiar. **Opposite:** Well-chosen, large-scale pieces make the living area seem longer than it is. For example, a tall mirror above the fireplace draws attention to the impressive height of the room. **Below:** Designer Eric Cohler relaxes in the completed loft.



As New York City designer Eric Cohler surveyed the raw 1,200-square-foot Des Moines loft space he was to bring to life for a fund-raising event, he leaned against a wall and discovered a bit of hidden history. A piece of plaster fell to the floor, revealing rustic terra-cotta wall tiles, original to the 1924 former warehouse. Peeling off the plaster unveiled a mosaic of earthy, mellow shades—brown, orange, and rust—that made an ideal backdrop for the layers of classic and modern furnishing, fabrics, and collectibles that are Cohler's design hallmark.

"Layering is really telling a story about who you are," Cohler says. "It's a means of looking at your past, present, and future." It's a design process that Cohler usually initiates using clients' personal mementos and family heirlooms, and then broadens in scope and period to include additional pieces that are clean and modern.

However, for this home's design, layering took on additional meaning for Cohler. It also worked as a technique to help characterize the space's fictitious residents: an empty-nest, world-traveling couple. Under Cohler's careful eye, African sculpture, Gustavian-influenced tables, and ultramodern nesting tables coexist beautifully and tell a sophisticated life story.

While each space within the loft features a variety of objects and textures, repeated colors and themes provide unity. In the living room, for example, the rug and fireplace both feature a Greek key pattern. Cohler then layered in lively, unexpected furniture partners, such as an antique grandmother's clock



Top: The free-flowing kitchen and dining zone encourages casual conversation during meal preparation. Above: A glossy black finish gives a contemporary edge to vintage-style subway tiles on the kitchen backsplash.

near a chrome-and-glass coffee table, a traditional console table topped with a sleek glass lamp, and a midcentury Aero Saarinen table ringed by graceful klismos-style chairs.

For more personality, tabletops function as microcosms of fond memories. Thoughtful arrangements of simple treasures—books and vases, small-scale framed art, and diminutive sculptures—look like special items acquired through the years. “Rooms need small arrangements on tabletops—a beautiful picture frame with Grandmother’s photo paired with a gleaming glass lamp and a fine wooden box,” Cohler explains.

This furnished flair and attention to detail continues in the kitchen. “Because this was one large open space,” Cohler says, “it was important to create continuity so your eye could easily travel from one area to the next.” In the kitchen, a contemporary acrylic sculpture and a simple glass votive serve as counterpoints to a rustic wooden bowl of green apples, Shaker-like black cabinetry, and glossy black subway tiles. An antique runner brings earthy color and vintage pattern to the floor.

“I approach design like a gardener,” Cohler says, summing up the carefully cultivated aesthetic he brings to his projects, especially this richly filled yet perfectly edited urban showhouse. “You have to prune out the dead leaves and let the flowers show, then you bring in new seedlings to give the space life.”

Resources on page 108.

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Above: Including sculptures in both the living area and kitchen provides continuity between the two spaces. **Far right:** A gently bowing kitchen island gives the appearance of a serving buffet from within the living and dining area. **Right:** On the kitchen-area side, the island houses an apron-front sink, dishwasher, and tons of storage.





Above left: The highest point of the floor-to-ceiling bedroom storage can be accessed by a rolling library ladder. **Above:** Pocket doors allow the creation of private spaces in the loft, such as this cozy study nook. Cabinetry and countertops echo the look of the kitchen for continuity. **Left:** Paired with the contemporary bed, the antique dresser provides visual tension as well as practical storage. **Opposite:** An upholstered suede headboard brings a note of tailored luxury to the bedroom, where the black accents and Greek-key pattern established in the public areas of the loft reappear. The wall behind the headboard is the back side of a closet corridor.

