

A San Francisco landmark, built in 1867, sets the stage for a loft renovation by Robert Edmonds

*text: james nestor
photography: bruce damonte*

historical drama



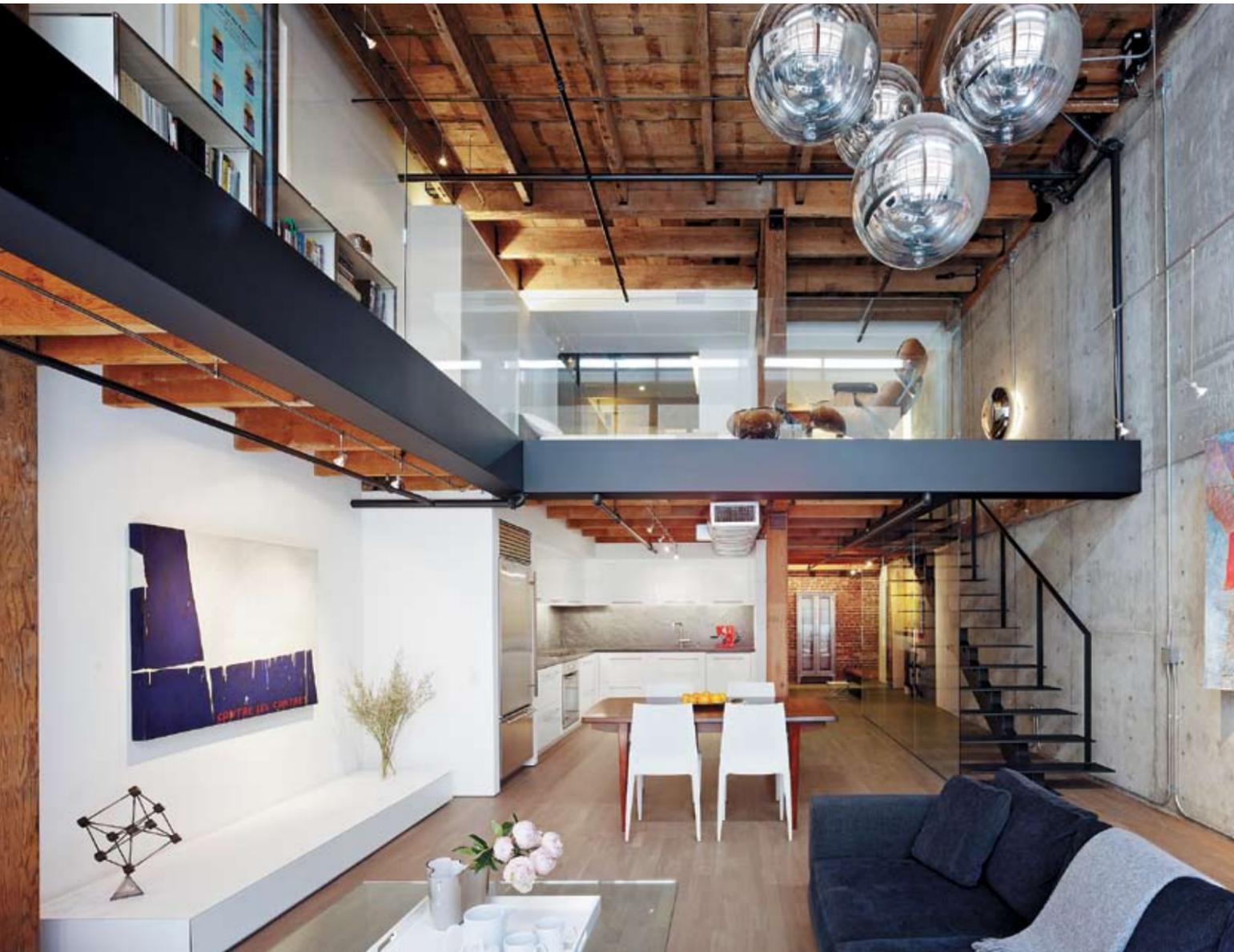
For Thomas Huot, home has rarely been a house. From a 14th-century convent in Paris, he moved to an 18th-century linen mill in London. Next came a 19th-century warehouse in Montreal. When he moved to San Francisco, he gravitated to the Oriental Warehouse, a block-long 1867 landmark built to store the rice, tea, silk, and other goods imported by the Pacific Mail Steamship Company. "Living in a historic place is keeping it alive," he says. But as much as Huot is attracted

to history, he has often felt stifled by the cramped floor plans and roughed-in aesthetics that usually come with it, and the duplex loft he bought in the San Francisco warehouse was no exception. Until he commissioned Edmonds + Lee Architects to address his seemingly opposing desires, that is. "The space was—how do I say this? Very beige," Robert Edmonds recalls. "Along with the drab color, there was no real hierarchy. Everything was cluttered and confused."

Edmonds and Huot met through a friend and immediately hit it off. For starters, both were embarking on a new chapter of their lives. Edmonds and his wife, Vivian Lee, arrived in San Francisco and founded their firm in 2005. Before that, they attended the Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation and worked, separately, at various New York firms on high-end residential projects and major museum expansions—Edmonds was on Ste-

ven Holl Architects's team for the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Missouri. Huot, a venture capitalist, moved to San Francisco in 2007. Because Lee didn't participate directly in the loft project, Edmonds alone met weekly with Huot to define primary areas of focus. One was historical, notably the richly patinated timber beams and the worn brick walls. Another, by contrast, was his collection of colorful, abstract contemporary art. Combining these elements produced

a 1,500-square-foot result that's equal parts gallery, diorama, and stage set for a cast of two, namely Huot and his girlfriend. Open the front door, and you're immediately front-and-center, a player on a stage that flows uninterrupted from end to end, with a concrete wall as a backdrop. The living area makes the most of its double height and exposed rafters. "When building new elements, we took the lightest, most delicate approach possible," Edmonds says. ➤



Previous spread: In the living area of a San Francisco loft by Edmonds + Lee Architects, Tom Dixon's pendant fixture hangs above Rodolfo Dordoni's sofa. Behind it are a vintage Danish credenza and an oil on canvas by Tom Holland. The staircase, with its ½-inch-thick steel treads, leads up to the bedroom suite.

Opposite: An oil on canvas by Serge Lemoyne is displayed in a niche in the living area. From here, flooring of pre-finished solid oak flows through the dining area and kitchen to terminate in a small office.

Left, from top: The stair's handrail is cold-rolled steel. In the kitchen, a counter and a backsplash of Virginia granite contrast with custom cabinets built 12 inches from the walls to accommodate structural columns and pipes for water and waste. **Right:** The Oriental Warehouse, which dates to 1867, was converted into live-work spaces in 1996.



Opposite: Pascal Morgue's lounge chairs accompany Carlo Scarpa's cocktail table in the living area, while Mario Bellini's chairs pull up to a vintage Danish rose-wood table in the dining area.

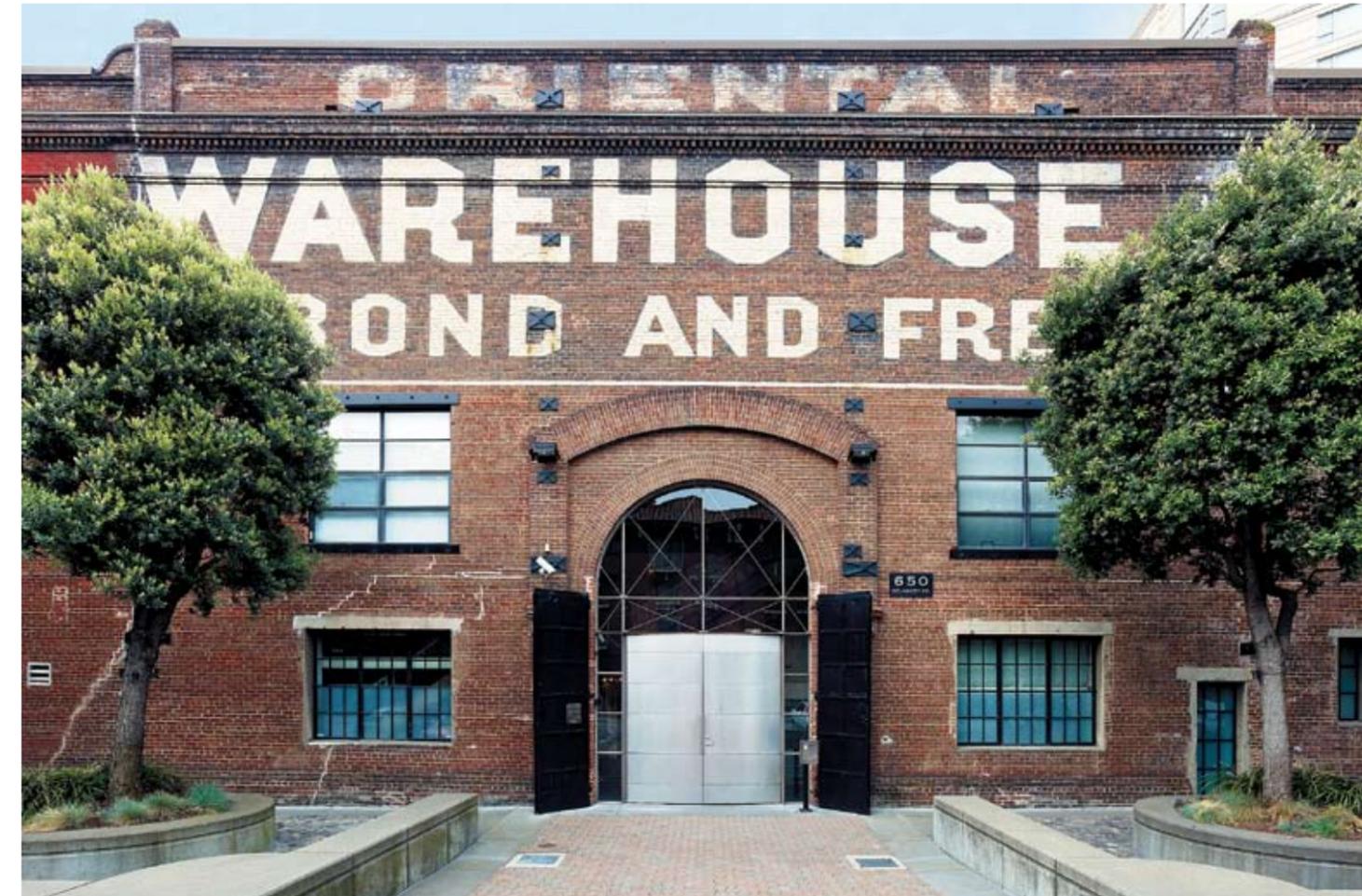
Below: The front of the building faces away from San Francisco Bay.

Balustrades above the living area, for example, are unframed panels of clear glass, replacing gypsum-board. "We would have had nothing there at all," he adds. "But, you know, regulations."

After the living area come the dining area and the open kitchen. Cabinetry in the latter was built in front of a tangle of pipes and structural columns, most of which could be neither moved nor altered. The appliances are flush with the cabi-

The oak treads of the previous staircase, ascending to the bedroom suite, were too thick for Edmonds and Huot's refined vision. "They broke up the fluidity of the space," Edmonds explains. He replaced them with razor-sharp steel so thin as to be barely noticeable.

Of all the instances of stripping-down, the most dramatic occurs, appropriately, between the bathroom and bedroom. Next to the bed stands a wall of black-tinted



net fronts. "I love this. Look how you can see a continuous line all the way down," Huot says, placing his head against one of the high-gloss white doors to demonstrate.

With nowhere to recess anything between the rafters, Edmonds hid lights behind kitchen cabinets and other built-ins, creating a diffused glow that also adds depth. Only the artwork is directly lit. The effect is of multiple bull's-eyes against the gray concrete or white paint.

glass that looks a bit like an art installation. Then, with a simple flick of a light switch, the color appears to fade away to reveal a huge shower, really a small room in its own right.

From the vantage point of the otherwise windowless bathroom, the magic wall eliminates claustrophobia by opening up a view that extends all the way out to the weathered brick of the building's courtyard wall. The sight line ➤

Below: Tinted glass separates the 40-square-foot shower from the bedroom.

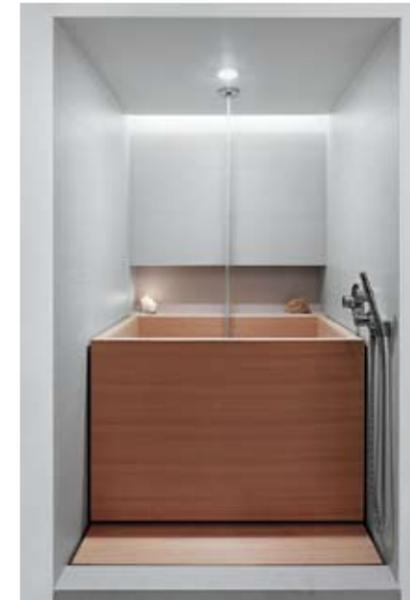
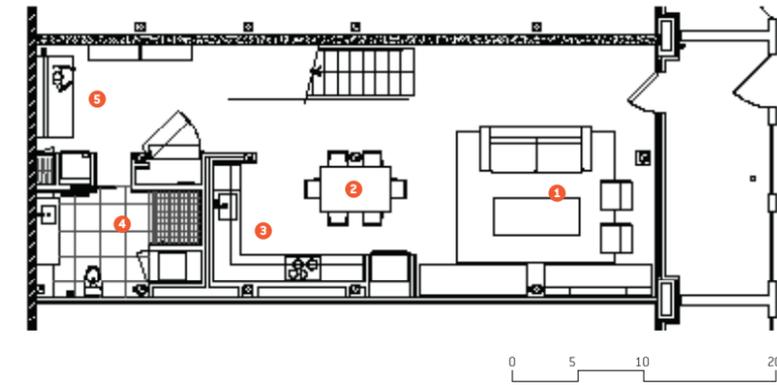
Opposite left, from top: Modular shelving by Fritz Haller and Paul Schärer creates a library on the balcony that extends from the bedroom. Naoto Fukasawa designed the bed. **Opposite right:** A chromed fitting in the ceiling fills the downstairs bathroom's cedar tub, built at the custom size of 3½ feet square.

passes through not one, not two, but *three* layers of glass: the shower enclosure, the upstairs balustrade, and the loft's exterior windows. Taking a shower is like standing in a kind of kaleidoscope of reflections and refractions.

Huot adores the bachelor-pad swank of the shower. "I was single when Robert and I started designing the apartment," he explains. But his girlfriend, visiting the job site, kept asking him, "Where am

I supposed to take a bath?"

Edmonds therefore made a last-minute alteration to the downstairs bathroom. Since a standard bathtub would have overwhelmed the small room, he opted for a custom-size Japanese-style cedar tub. Installing the tub filler in the ceiling further kept things "as light as possible," he adds. In the eyes of this ultra-minimalist, less is apparently still more. . . more or less. 



PROJECT TEAM

JAMES KIRKPATRICK: EDMONDS + LEE ARCHITECTS. **INTERTIE SYSTEMS:** AUDIOVISUAL CONSULTANT. **DOUBLE-D ENGINEERING:** STRUCTURAL ENGINEER. **MISSION BELL MANUFACTURING:** WOODWORK. **NUEVA CASTILLA CO.:** STEELWORK. **K.C. GLASS:** GLASSWORK. **TEAM COMMERCIAL CONSTRUCTION:** GENERAL CONTRACTOR.

PRODUCT SOURCES

FROM FRONT **MINOTTI:** SOFA (LIVING AREA). **TOM DIXON:** PENDANT FIXTURE (LIVING AREA), SCONCE (STAIRWELL). **SUB-ZERO:** REFRIGERATOR (KITCHEN). **MIELE:** COOKTOP, OVEN. **BLANCO:** SINK. **GROHE:** SINK FITTINGS. **BENATTAR MARBLE & GRANITE:** CUSTOM COUNTER, BACKSPLASH. **LIGNE ROSET:** CHAIRS (LIVING AREA). **SIMON:** COCKTAIL TABLE. **HELLER:** CHAIRS (DINING AREA). **CERAMICHE CAESAR:** FLOOR TILE (UPSTAIRS BATHROOM). **G-FORCE GLASS:** DIVIDER MATERIAL. **HANSGRÖHE:** SHOWER FITTINGS (UPSTAIRS BATHROOM), TUB FITTINGS (DOWNSTAIRS BATHROOM). **USM:** SHELVING (BALCONY). **B&B ITALIA:** BED (BEDROOM). **ROBERTS HOT TUBS:** CUSTOM TUB (DOWNSTAIRS BATHROOM). **KOHLER CO.:** TUB FILLER. **THROUGHOUT** **JUNCKERS HARDWOOD:** FLOORING. **BENJAMIN MOORE & CO.:** PAINT.