



GUIDING LIGHT

Architect **WILLIAM RUHL** defines the open terrain of a downtown loft

By **Louis Postel**

Photographs by Jordi Miralles Fotografia

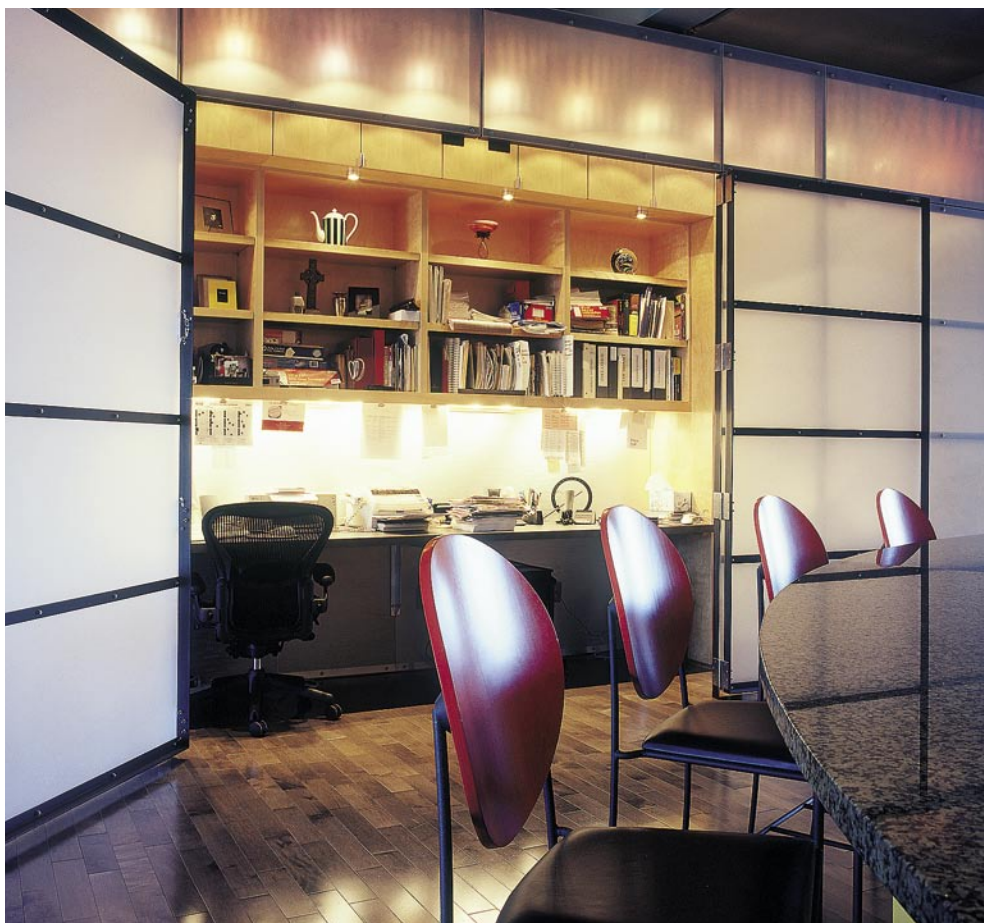
THE FIRST THING WILLIAM RUHL SAW WAS A blank canvas. When Gary Ritacco and Michael Hunter hired Ruhl, principal of Boston-based Ruhl Walker Architects, to design their South End loft, the open space was part of a newly constructed loft building and, according to Ruhl, the space was raw.

"I saw an 80-foot-long wall with 12-foot-high ceilings that was blank," says Ruhl. Hunter and Ritacco wanted an industrial, loft-like feel. "Gary called it a 'masculine palette of materials,'" Ruhl says. "But it had to be comfortable and warm as well." They also needed it to be multifunctional—with room to live, work (Ritacco worked at home before opening Uniform, his hip South End menswear boutique) and entertain.

WIDE OPEN

William Ruhl, principal of Ruhl Walker Architects in Boston, designed partitions with an industrial feel to create a functional living area in this long, narrow, almost 2,000-square-foot loft.

"Everything, including vast storage space, had to be built in. Every square inch needed to be accounted for, like a ship," says Ruhl. Turn to page 151 for additional information.



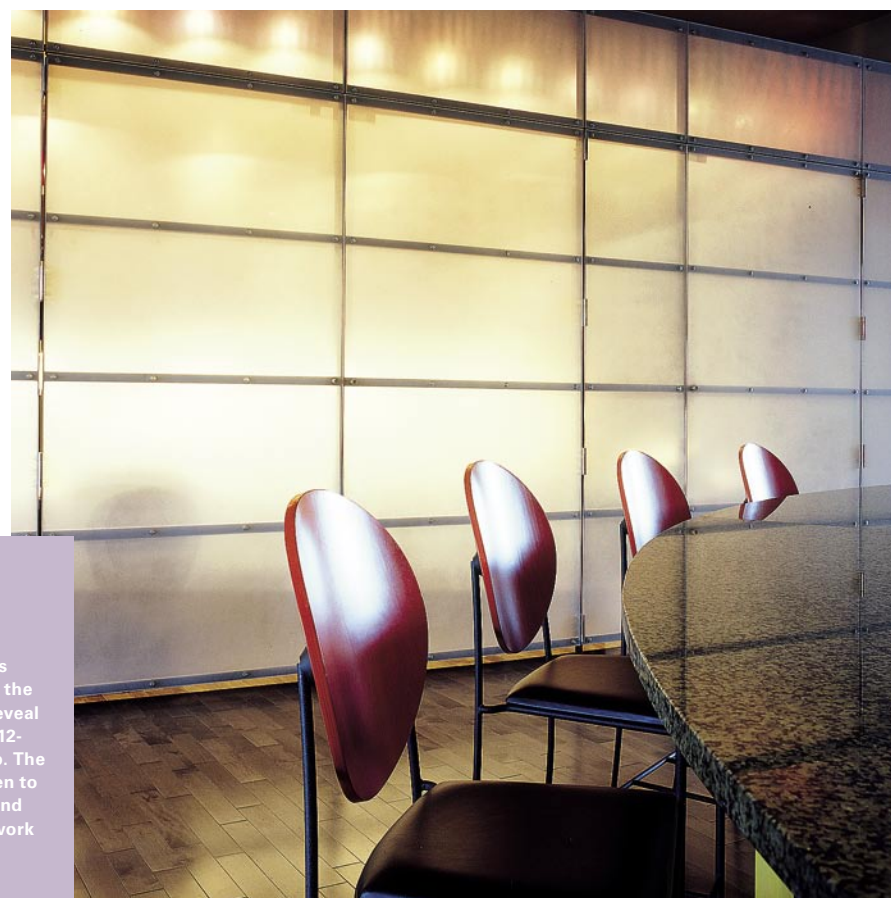
SUN BAKED

Homeowners Gary Ritacco and Michael Hunter were treated to a vivid version of one of their favorite colors, yellow, in the streamlined kitchen. "We thought that if we had an awesome kitchen, we would become master chefs," says Ritacco, "but it hasn't worked out that way."



"Every space had to function in as many ways as possible," says Ruhl. "It had to accommodate occasional guests and parties for up to 200 people."

His other challenge was light. The loft is long and narrow with small windows on the walls facing east and west. In between, there were just those 80 feet of white wall. But why meet one challenge at a time, when you can address two? Ruhl designed two partitions to "soak daylight into the rooms" and give dynamic structure to the open space. One, which Ruhl says functions as a "virtual window and catches a little bit of morning light," is a luminous wall made of hand-sanded polycarbonate panels that provides a



NOW YOU SEE IT...

A wall of sanded polycarbonate panels seems to float above the floor, with a 2-inch reveal at the bottom and a 12-inch reveal at the top. The moveable panels open to office space, ABOVE, and easily close to hide work away, RIGHT.

FULLY FURNISHED

A dining table and chairs by Philippe Starck, and a side chair and coffee table, OPPOSITE BOTTOM, both from Ligne Roset at Adesso in Boston, complete the loft's streamlined look.



hefty amount of screened-out space. Ritacco's home office, a walk-in closet and deep drawers for storage sit behind.

"Glass just wasn't part of the budget. It's 10 times more expensive," says Ruhl. "The polycarbonate tends to expand and contract, creating a softening, bowing effect almost like a fabric." Dave Blakney, a custom metalworker in Woburn, built the aluminum framing and the stainless-steel windowsills.



STEEL YOURSELF

Cool materials, such as brushed aluminum, play nicely with primary colors and natural wood. The floors throughout are a factory-dyed maple from Hoboken Floors in the Boston Design Center.

TEAMWORK

After successfully working together on the loft, homeowner Gary Ritacco, BELOW, hired Ruhl to design his South End menswear boutique, Uniform.



Even a custom-carved birch window chaise was designed with consideration to the sun's rays...
the perfect spot to bask in the light.

Another partition in the living room is a Formica product of brushed aluminum that helps lasso in the afternoon sun and provides media storage. “A lot of people suppose these metal panels are simply to obtain some sort of industrial look,” says Ruhl, “but really they’re very soft-looking, like gently running water, and they help bounce a lot of light into the space.”

In the two bedrooms, Ruhl made the “walls” optional. By the guest room, solid wood panels slide along industrial-

(continued on page 137)

MORNING LIGHT

Although the master suite, bathed with light from an east-facing window, can be shut off from the rest of the loft, Ritacco and Hunter opt to keep the space open when they don’t have guests. Here the polycarbonate-paneled wall hides the bedroom’s walk-in closet.



A TALE OF TWO SINKS

Two Kohler sinks mounted on a slab of Carrera marble—one rectangular (Ritacco’s) and one spherical (Hunter’s)—lend some character and, says Ruhl, help to avoid dreaded “matchy-matchiness.” A curbless shower of green Scottish limestone extends the loft’s open theme.