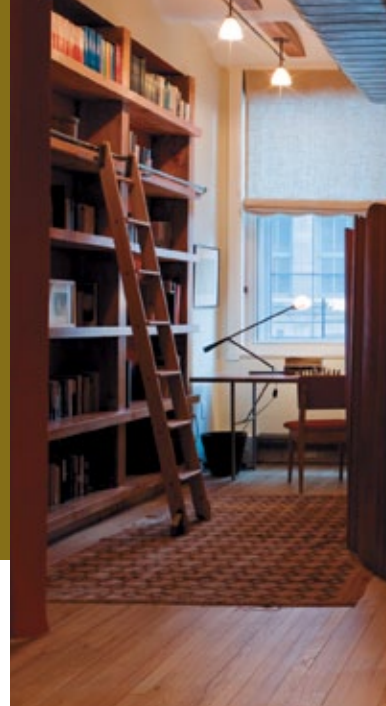




wood is good

A New York loft
by 2Michaels
sidesteps
the downtown
clichés of slick
and shiny

text:
fred a. bernstein
photography:
eric laignel



Previous spread: A chair by Frank Lloyd Wright and its slat-backed 1940's walnut mate sit in front of a Harvey Propper cocktail table in the living area of a New York loft by 2Michaels. Shades of horsehair and linen burlap are layered over the original 19th-century windows.

Opposite top, left: The living area's custom Douglas fir bookcase also accommodates a 52-inch television. **Opposite top, right:** The study features a French 1940's bistro screen, a George Nelson desk, and a rare Norman Chamer chair.

Left: Belgian 1940's factory lamps illuminate the English 1880 oak dining table. **Top right:** A Persian rug in the study and a Turkish kilim in the living area date to the turn of the last century. **Bottom right:** A French 1950's bookcase stands in the entry.

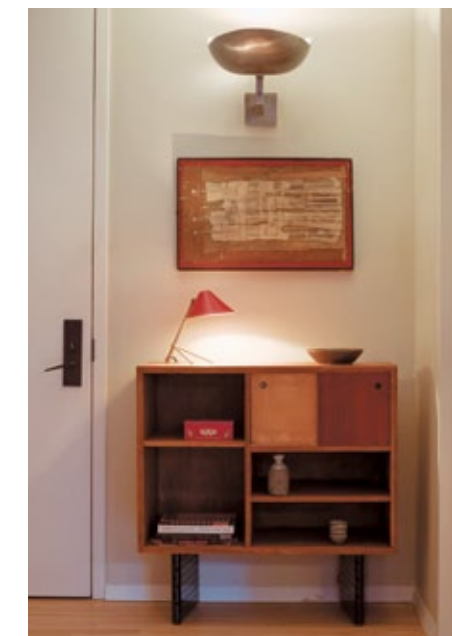
Jayne and Joan Michaels, identical twins and partners in the firm 2Michaels, understand how seductive a photograph can be. Their firm's Web site opens on a single image: a corner of one sister's living room, where a shapely chaise and side table create an irresistible tableau. The photo's poetry has enticed many potential clients, including the firm's former partner Jeff English, who still operates as English & Michaels. Then they took over the loft for a day, got up on ladders, and used kraft paper to stand in for segments of beam. The clients returned and gave the go-ahead, and the designers came up with the idea of simulated beams, actually three-sided boxes constructed from

would produce the hand-crafted aesthetic of a basket weave. At the same time, the straight edges of the beams would bring the dramatic curves of the vaults into high relief.

While the owners hesitated about proceeding, the sisters consulted their former partner Jeff English, who still operates as English & Michaels. Then they took over the loft for a day, got up on ladders, and used kraft paper to stand in for segments of beam. The clients returned and gave the go-ahead, and the designers came up with the idea of simulated beams, actually three-sided boxes constructed from

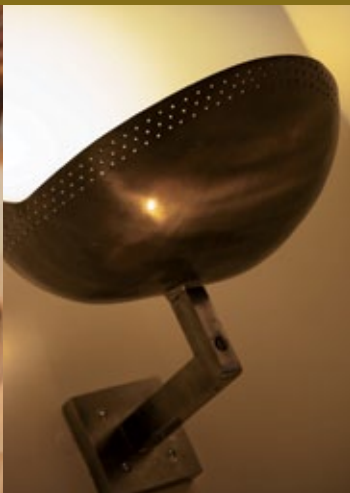
Not long after discovering the site, she showed the designers her own set of seductive images, photos of rooms she found appealing. "Every space had a wooden ceiling," Joan Michaels recalls. Although the client hadn't made that connection herself, she had requested lots of wood. She even used the word *country*, not often heard in the canyons of lower Manhattan. Her goal for the space—a home for herself, her husband, and their baby daughter—was to avoid slick and shiny.

A paneled ceiling would have set just the right rustic tone, but the apartment had barrel vaults—in the style of many 19th-century industrial buildings. Covering the vaults with wood would have erased the space's history and compromised the ceiling height. But it might be possible, Joan Michaels realized, to insert segments of beams crosswise in the vaults. The contrast of medium-stained wood and light-painted plaster





Top: A single sheet of butternut veneer covers doors on a wall of kitchen cabinets, while similar veneer clads lower cabinetry and the island, both limestone-topped. **Bottom, from left:** Abel Sorenson's 1945 dining chairs for Knoll. The entry's 1940's sconce in hammered and perforated aluminum. Sliding panels of resin on kitchen shelving. Aluminum industrial stools from the 1940's. **Opposite:** The kitchen clock was made in the 1950's.



boards. Because the vaults are different dimensions, the general contractor had to make a template of each one before cutting the lengths of Douglas fir to fit.

The result is a loft-size collage of thick and thin, dark and light, rounded and sharp. A collateral benefit: the hollow faux beams made it possible to hang light fixtures almost anywhere. The alternative, English says, would have been to attach metal conduits, sometimes awkwardly, to the ceiling.

An exposed heating duct, which runs through much of the apartment, offers another example of the way the designers capitalized

on constraints. "On our first visit, it stuck out like a sore thumb," Jayne Michaels recalls. Boxing it in would have been ungainly. So, with an attitude of "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em," the sisters gave the apartment an industrial spirit of which the duct was simply one component. Factory lamps and unfinished lumber abound. Pieces are not only rough but also large. "The space is so big—anything small would get lost," Jayne Michaels says.

That hardly means the furniture is unsophisticated, however. "We set out to find very special pieces, things you wouldn't see anywhere else," Jayne Michaels says. Luckily,

her sister's partner in life is Larry Weinberg—a dealer in important 20th-century furniture and a private curator—and the three have also teamed up under the name 4PM to sell mid-century furnishings on the Web and at a small shop in New York. Collaborating with Weinberg on the apartment, the sisters found a farm table large enough for the couple's extended family as well as a set of six chairs with woven-leather seats, designed by Abel Sorenson for Knoll in the 1940's. Other showstoppers include chairs by Frank Lloyd Wright and George Nakashima and an armoire by Le Corbusier and Charlotte Perriand. ➤



Top left: A French 1950's chair and a Turkish 1920's rug furnish the entry to the master suite. **Bottom left:** In the master bedroom, a credenza by T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings stands next to a dormitory armoire that Le Corbusier and Charlotte Perriand designed for the Cité Internationale Universitaire in Paris. **Right:** Both the desk and chair are Dutch 1940's. **Opposite bottom, left:** Two 1940's Louis Majorelle tables and 1930's industrial lamps flank a bed by Tyler Hays. **Opposite bottom, right:** Tue Poulsen designed this bottle in the 1950's.

The wife, who's a writer, was interested in furniture she could learn about, pieces with stories.

The sisters and English also designed built-ins to look "somewhere between old and new," Jayne Michaels says. A freestanding bookcase dividing the living area from the study is an elegant composition of horizontal and vertical elements, all of considerable heft. The kitchen features a wall of upper cabinets with doors surfaced in a single piece of butternut veneer, chosen because it has a figurative quality almost like a painting. Because the apartment's long and narrow floor plan terminates at the kitchen, the designers imagined it as a culmination, a visual tour de force.

On the wall perpendicular to the butternut "painting" is a system of walnut shelves. So as not to interrupt the horizontal emphasis with conventional, vertical cabinet doors, the designers substituted wide sliding panels of a translucent white resin reminiscent of rice paper. Where the natural wood and the white synthetic come together, there is a weaving of dark and light, thick and thin, just as there is on the ceiling. Even in the most utilitarian of spaces, the apartment's themes remain in photo-ready focus. 🍷

PROJECT TEAM
PEGGY SMITH: 2MICHAELS. **MICHAEL ZENREICH**
ARCHITECT: ARCHITECT OF RECORD. **ASPEN INTERIOR**
CONSTRUCTION: GENERAL CONTRACTOR.

PRODUCT SOURCES
FROM FRONT HOLLY HUNT: RED SOFA (LIVING AREA).
ANTHONY LAWRENCE-BELFAIR: CUSTOM BROWN SOFA. **LARSEN:** BROWN SOFA FABRIC. **THROUGH FRANK ROGIN:** FLOOR LAMP. **THROUGH 4PM:** COCKTAIL TABLE, SLAT-BACKED CHAIR, CERAMIC TABLE LAMP (LIVING AREA), CHAIR, DESK (STUDY), PENDANT FIXTURES, TABLE LAMP (DINING AREA), SCONCE (ENTRY), CHAIRS, CREDENZA, TABLE LAMPS, OTTOMAN, DESK, BOTTLE (SUITE). **THROUGH LIN-WEINBERG:** SOLID-BACKED CHAIR (LIVING AREA), CHAIRS (DINING AREA). **THROUGH WOODSTER GALLERY:** OAK TABLE (LIVING AREA), BUFFET (DINING AREA). **O'LAMPRIA STUDIO:** CUSTOM CEILING FIXTURES (LIVING, DINING AREAS, STUDY, KITCHEN). **LE CRIN:** BROWN WINDOW SHADE FABRIC (LIVING, DINING AREAS, KITCHEN). **HENRY CALVIN FABRICS THROUGH DONGHIA:** TAUPE WINDOW SHADE FABRIC (LIVING, DINING AREAS, KITCHEN), CURTAIN FABRIC (KITCHEN). **THROUGH ABC CARPET & HOME:** RUGS (LIVING AREA, SUITE). **THROUGH EMERSON TROOP:** SCREEN (STUDY). **THROUGH J&D ORIENTAL RUGS CO.:** RUGS (STUDY, SUITE). **THROUGH ANN-MORRIS ANTIQUES:** TABLE (DINING AREA). **THROUGH MAGEN H. GALLERY:** VASE, TRAY. **THROUGH ORANGE:** BOOKCASE (ENTRY). **FRANKE:** SINK FITTINGS (KITCHEN). **LUMICOR:** SLIDING DOOR MATERIAL. **THROUGH JUDITH AND JAMES MILNE:** STOOLS. **VIKING RANGE CORPORATION:** COOKTOP, OVENS. **SUB-ZERO:** REFRIGERATOR. **THROUGH BLEND:** ARMOIRE (SUITE). **BERGAMO FABRICS:** CHAIR FABRIC, OTTOMAN FABRIC. **OFF-WHITE CASTLE STUDIO:** DUVET FABRIC. **BDDW:** BED. **THROUGH LAST CENTURY:** TABLES. **THROUGH REWIRE:** BEDSIDE LAMPS. **ANGEL THREADS:** CUSTOM DUVET COVER (SUITE), CUSTOM WINDOW SHADES. **THROUGHOUT PRATT & LAMBERT:** PAINT. **CHRIS STAVRINOU & ASSOCIATES:** WOODWORK.

