

Gateaux  
Bakery

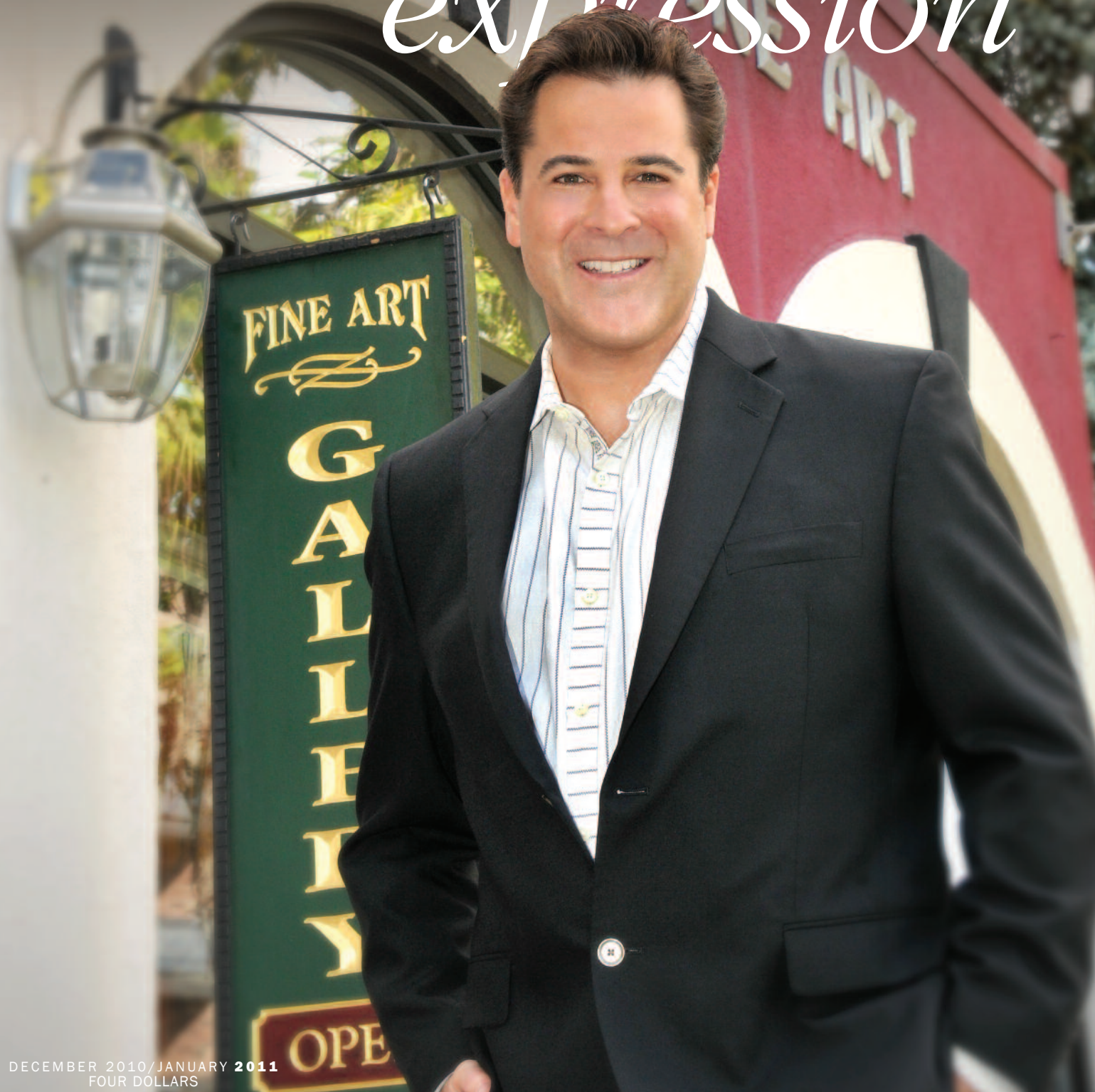
Aaron  
LaPedis  
Renaissance Man

Vienna  
Ball

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O F T H E W E S T

Beautiful spaces and the people who design, live and work in them





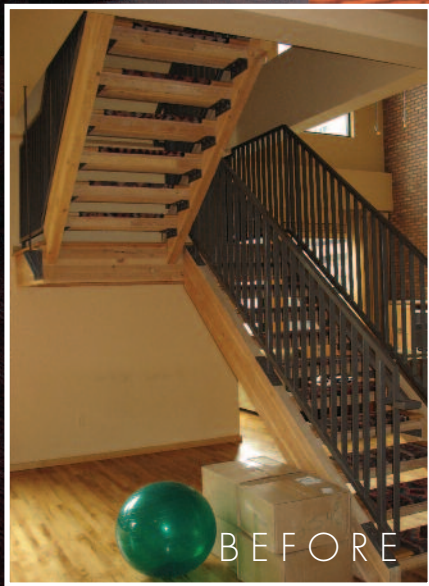
PHOTO: THE ARCHITECTURE STUDIO

## A DOWNTOWN DENVER LOFT, AND IT'S HOMEOWNER, GET A FRESH START

WHEN CALIFORNIA NATIVE and former Telluride resident Giovanna Shernoff lost her fiancé in a tragic accident, she knew it was time for a change in her life; time to move on from the tiny mountain community that held so many memories. "I wanted to open my life up to a new environment and a new setting," she says today. That new place was Denver. • Shernoff had done the mountain thing, and the suburban southern California thing, but not yet the downtown condo thing, with the theater, major sporting events, art galleries, and restaurants. In other words, she was ready for a chic urban lifestyle, and needed a loft space to match.

### LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Shernoff found her city sanctuary in the penthouse unit of the Isbell Lofts, on the corner of 18th and Larimer in the heart of downtown Denver. The location couldn't have been more perfect. "It's two blocks north of the 16th Street Mall, five blocks from Coors Field, less than a mile from the Pepsi Center and Invesco Field, and within walking distance of museums and art galleries," she explains. The location, in a sense, demanded a different kind of space, says project architect Tom Hart, of The Architecture Studio. "It's a downtown loft versus a LoDo loft," he explains. "You're in the heart of the commerce and the culture, compared to all the bars." This proved an important distinction when it came to Shernoff's aesthetic. **BY PETER BRONSKI**



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PHOTO: THE ARCHITECTURE STUDIO



PHOTO: LYNN SHANNON

## THE AESTHETIC

While Shernoff loved the location and the 2,400 square feet of space spread across two floors, she didn't care for the industrial loft look. "The 24-foot living room wall was brick veneer from floor to ceiling. There was exposed ductwork," she recalls. In other words, it was a classic loft look. "But it was built to look like a loft," Shernoff continues. "Lofts in my mind are things that once were. You're living with the old and finding beauty in things that once were—retail stores, warehouses. You embrace those things. But this place wasn't old. It was made to look that way, with no actual reverence to things of years gone by." (The 5th and 6th floors that make up the Isbell Lofts were added by the developer to the previously-four-story Isbell-Kent-Oakes Dry Goods Company building.) "And so why would I keep these things?" Shernoff concludes. "If I lived downtown, urban meant contemporary."

To make that happen, Shernoff enlisted interior designer Lynn Shannon of Lynn Shannon Interior Design. The goal was simple, she says, reciting a litany of words to describe her ideal: "Upscale, contemporary, Manhattan-esque, clean, classic, urbane, sophisticated, uncluttered, not overdone, minimal, timeless."

## THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Executing that vision meant tackling head-on a very big elephant in the room. One wall of that room, actually. The brick-veneered behemoth. Soon enough, the brick was gone. So, too, was the exposed ductwork, hidden behind soffits. In its place came painted sheetrock, floating ledges to visually break up the space and provide spots on which to place pieces of Shernoff's extensive art collection, a cherry-paneled section of wall that concealed a large multimedia entertainment center, and a continuous ribbon fireplace with limestone tiles and concrete.

Copies of *Architectural Digest* and *W* adorn a conversation piece coffee table from the Denver Design District. A pair of starburst chandeliers hang from the ceiling—they look like fireworks at night—and torch lighting along the walls and spotlights on various pieces of artwork complete the transformation.

## STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

The stairway that divided the living room from the kitchen and dining room necessarily became a part of the renovation as well; the rustic wood steps and wrought iron railings were out of step with the new direction of the loft. Inspired by a photo she'd seen in a design magazine years earlier, Shernoff enlisted Hart to come up with an elegant "floating stair" solution, in which the staircase appeared to



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PHOTO: THE ARCHITECTURE STUDIO



PHOTO: LYNN SHANNON

be comprised of solid blocks of walnut that didn't look to be held up by anything at all. The wrought iron railings, meanwhile, were replaced with clear glass panels that matched the contemporary look of the loft and opened up the space between the first floor rooms.

Hart worked with engineers to structurally make it happen. The result proved to be Shernoff's favorite part of the whole project. "It's an art form in itself," she gleams. "First time visitors always say, 'My God, what's holding that thing up?'"

On the second floor of the house, at the top of Shernoff's personal stairway to heaven, is the master bedroom and bathroom suite. In a sense, it is a sanctuary within the greater sanctuary that is her loft. It takes the contemporary aesthetic and gives it a distinct Asian twist to create a Zen-like master bedroom and bathroom that evoke the feel of a luxury hotel suite and spa. Other elements include a custom king-size bed with integrated side tables, Ralph Lauren sitting chairs and wallpaper, and custom wool-and-silk area rugs made by Allure Rug Studio in Denver (the dining room and living room also have similar rugs).

## ART EVERYWHERE

Perhaps the most unifying element of all throughout the space, more so than even the overall aesthetic, is the omnipresence of artwork. Though Shernoff already owned roughly 150 pieces of artwork—mostly from Southern California artists and designers, such as Millard Sheets and Sam Maloof, acquired over a long period of years during a previous marriage—she started almost with a clean slate, seeking to fill the loft with art that matched her newfound urban sensibilities. Her collection now includes work by California artist Susan Hertel, pieces from Denver's Pismo Fine Art Glass, multiple pieces from the Cherry Creek Arts Festival, and work by her son, Mitchell Shernoff, to name a few.

## A LOFT, COMPLETED

In the end, Shernoff's six-month loft renovation was a resounding success, enough so to garner a spot on HGTV's "New Spaces" segment. The project's lofty \$300,000 final price tag notwithstanding, Shernoff says there are lessons that can be applied to any project, no matter the budget. "Any residence I've ever been in, I will go to great lengths to make it my own. You have to feel good about your space," she says. "This is the place you spend every day of your life. The beauty around you in that space is good for your soul, your mind, your mood."

Peter Bronski is an award-winning writer whose work has appeared in more than 70 magazines, including *Colorado Expression*, *Men's Journal*, and *Caribbean Travel & Life*.



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