

IT'S ELEMENTARY

INSIDE A CONVERTED SEATTLE
SCHOOL GYM, MODERN ELEMENTS
AND CONTEMPORARY ART MAKE FOR
A SOPHISTICATED URBAN ABODE.

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—MARK ASHBY

Designers Mark Ashby and Anne Grandinetti had barely finished decorating their clients' modern-rustic ranch house in Austin when a new job called them to the Pacific Northwest. "As life happens, there was an opportunity for our clients to move to Seattle, so we came along for the ride," says Grandinetti, who, along with Ashby, is based in Austin. The move presented just as much opportunity for the designers, who emerged from their sun-soaked Texas milieu to craft an interior that befits Seattle's cloudier urban environment. "They gave us a lot of creative freedom to run with this and be a lot more brave," Ashby says.

The designers didn't have to go very far to start the design process. As luck would have it, the owners purchased a loft—in the gymnasium of a former elementary school that was adapted into condos—from an art consultant who had previously worked with Ashby. Additionally, he advised them to acquire two pieces that were already hanging in the space: an etched, back-lit mirror in the entry that glows like a constellation of stars and a large-scale acrylic painting between the entry and dining area.

The dining area, too, already came with a table—a massive 18-foot sculpture made from a 400-year-old redwood tree, which architect Eric Cobb, of E. Cobb Architects Inc, installed during a renovation for the space's previous owners. The table was assembled inside the space during construction "and will be forever passed down to future residents of the gym," Grandinetti notes.

From there, it was a matter of choosing furniture, art and accessories to fill the soaring space, previously renovated by construction firm Flip Builders Inc, now known as ESMB. Everything else, including the outdoor landscaping, the hardwood and terrazzo flooring, the custom Viking appliances and the pendant lights over the dining table—even the nubby carpet on the guest room's raised platform—was in pristine condition.

Ashby and Grandinetti immediately saw the dining area as an opportunity to purchase overscale drawings from

artist Robert Longo's famous *Men in the Cities* series. Not only do the bold works contrast with the rough-hewn table, Ashby says, "but the movement of those two figures were in keeping with the space having been an active gym." In addition, because there's no family room, the adjacent living area had to double as a display space that's visible on all sides and functions as the owners' main hangout. "We wanted it to be comfortable, so we could really relax in the room without it feeling too slouchy or messy," Grandinetti says. For that reason, the designers decided against "a typical loungy sectional" and instead opted for more sculptural furnishings that are upholstered in soft, cozy fabrics.

The cream, gray and black tones of the furniture throughout the loft reflect Seattle's climate, and the vibrant artwork and accessories inject a bit of color into the spaces. In the sleek black-and-white kitchen, for instance, crushed, lacquered oil drums by artist Gregg Hill bring in a visual jolt. These pieces were custom-colored for the space, including a yellow shade that matches the appliances. Red is another recurring theme in the home, starting with the stool, with an apple-like shape, on the entry floor that channels the former elementary school. "We snuck that piece in to pay tribute to the building's history," Grandinetti notes.

While the couple are now Seattle-based, their former home state is never far away. For example, many furnishings and works of art were sourced from the couple's former stomping grounds, including an arresting mixed-media piece by Sandra C. Fernández and Lee Chesney over the master bed. The roiling, blossom-like work is a stylish foil against the trees, shrubs and potted plants outside the master bedroom's floor-to-ceiling windows.

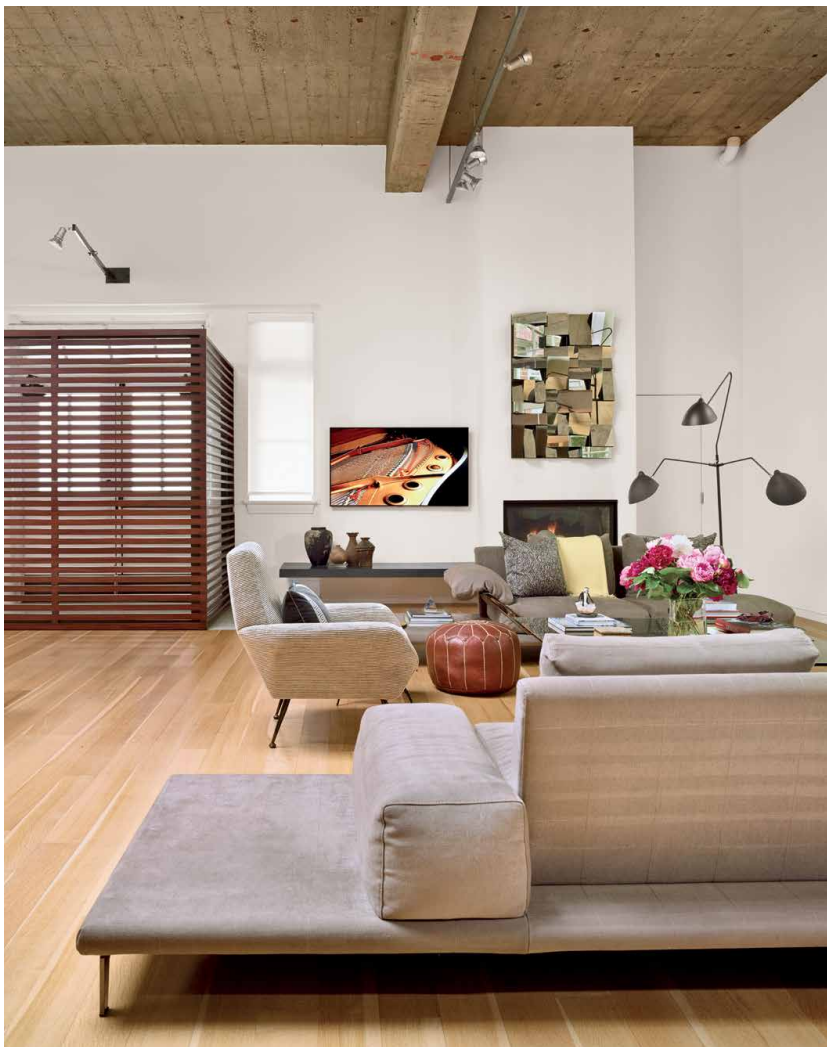
In the fairy-tale-like garden beyond, Ashby and Grandinetti chose stark white furnishings to stand out from the green hues, which landscape designer Scott Hale, of Taxus Gardeners, orchestrated for the previous owner and still maintains for the current owners. "It's very lush, so we wanted something to really pop out of the greenery," Grandinetti says, adding that it all had to be low-maintenance "because of the weather—nothing with a lot of cushions, nothing that the elements could be hard on." Happily for everyone involved, the sleek lines of tables and chairs by such design icons as Verner Panton, Philippe Starck and John Dickinson fit the bill.

For Ashby and Grandinetti, the project was a welcome challenge. "It was inspiring to interpret a more modern space than we had designed for them before," Ashby says. And with their clients now happily settled in, the designers report that the loft looks the same as the day they finished decorating, thanks in large part to their elegantly restrained vision. As Grandinetti points out, "It's important to edit, so that it always feels good at the end of a long, busy day." ■



In a nod to a Seattle loft's previous life as a 1920s elementary school gym, designers Mark Ashby and Anne Grandinetti placed a Baleri Italia stool from Scott + Cooner in Austin, reminiscent of an apple, in the foyer. The Saarinen table is from Design Within Reach.

Sofas by Roche Bobois and a vintage Italian armchair—from Rareit Antique Gallery in Austin—covered in a Pollock fabric gather in the expansive living area. The three-arm Serge Mouille floor lamp is from Design Within Reach, and the midcentury Cubist mirror is from Classic Modern Design through 1stdibs.



Bride's Veil stools from Twentieth and custom-lacquered oil drums by artist Gregg Hill from The Loft at Liz's, both in Los Angeles, bring dynamic flair to the kitchen. The Viking appliances in a custom hue were added in a prior renovation helmed by architect Eric Cobb.



The massive redwood table in the dining area provides a rustic foil for the modern elements around it, including photographs from Robert Longo's *Men in the Cities* series, leather dining chairs by Mario Bellini for Cassina and Gaetano Pesce rubber vases from Scott + Cooner.

"THE MOVEMENT OF THOSE TWO ROBERT LONGO FIGURES WAS IN KEEPING WITH THE SPACE HAVING BEEN AN ACTIVE GYM."

MARK ASHBY



A Henry Clarke photo from Vieux Interiors in Houston hangs by a custom Verellen daybed covered in a Donghia striped fabric in the guest room. The designers retained the exposed-concrete details to blend the space with the rest of the home.





Above: On the terrace, the owners' dog lounges near a pair of Brown Jordan Cloud Nine chairs and a six-leg African table by John Dickinson from David Sutherland in Houston. The Bubble Club sofa is by Philippe Starck from Design Within Reach.

Left: An Eos table by Matthew Hilton for Case Furniture and Pantone chairs, all from Design Within Reach, create a stylish dining area on the terrace, a space that retains its existing landscaping. The custom metal chiminea is from Mockingbird Domestics in Austin.

The master bedroom overlooks the loft's leafy terrace. The Carmichael bed by Gus Design Group nestles between existing built-ins. Above the bed is a mixed-media piece by both Sandra C. Fernández and Lee Chesney purchased from Davis Gallery & Framing in Austin. The red Phillips Collection chair is from One Kings Lane.

