

A Minneapolis man embraces midlife with
a new downtown loft and no crisis in sight

Modern Milestone

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Milestone birthdays often inspire dramatic action, and Peter Zenner's 50th was no exception. As the occasion neared, Zenner became eager to try something new, yet he had no desire to run a marathon or buy a convertible. He craved a change of scenery. That's exactly what he accomplished when he decided to sell his century-old Victorian home in the Lowry Hill East neighborhood of Minneapolis and buy a loft along the downtown riverfront. "Fifty was a turning point for me," Zenner says. "I was ready for something totally different than what I had—something modern, something with a view, and something in the heart of the city."

Major life changes rarely happen without hiccups, however, and Zenner's search turned up lots of "cookie cutter"

PREVIOUS SPREAD Loft-dweller Peter Zenner finds his new home offers ideal spaces for conducting business and for entertaining friends and family. The central lounge area in the foreground, anchored by a John Mark sofa and Knowlton Brothers cocktail table, is open to the clean-lined kitchen. The steel-clad cabinets that reflect light from the facing windows conceal the refrigerator. The tuck-under microwave and wine cooler in the island also keep things neat. THIS PAGE Each "Moreau" comfy chair by Bernhardt in the corner sitting room offers a unique view of Gold Medal Park and the Mississippi.





OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT The foyer doubles as a reception area and art gallery, where Zenner, an avid collector, shows off a few of his treasures. The large vessel is by Joe Christenson, a nationally recognized potter from Hudson, Wisconsin. He also custom glazed the smaller piece in the lounge area after visiting the loft and seeing the view. OPPOSITE RIGHT The tile walls of the guest bathroom echo the kitchen's subtle river-blue palette. BELOW The owner's bedroom continues the loft's sophisticated and masculine demeanor.

dwellings with little urban appeal. Eventually, he opted for a three-bedroom unit on the ninth floor of the future Bridge-water development—a decision that ratcheted up his stress level, since he was buying something that didn't yet exist. He asked Minneapolis designer David Heide to help him select new furnishings. Zenner had previously hired Heide, whose namesake firm is known for its award-winning architectural renovation and preservation work, to design a porch for his vintage home. Given his new digs would be vastly different, Zenner wasn't sure Heide would want the job. Actually, he leapt at the chance. "Good design transcends style," Heide says.

Intrigued as he was by its modern framework, Heide proposed reworking the home's disjointed floor plan. "There were real opportunities for improvement," says Zenner. "Once David and his team shared their vision, there was really no question. When you've gone this far, you might as well go all the way."

A month before construction began, Heide and lead architect Mark Nelson, AIA, reworked the loft's 2,300 square feet to function better for Zenner, who runs an interactive multimedia company from his home. Besides a large office and

meeting area for clients, he wanted a comfortable space for entertaining family and friends. Room to create and display artwork was another priority for Zenner, an enthusiastic collector who also creates sculptures and stained-glass pieces.

The challenge, says Heide, was to keep the loft's open, airy feel while creating definitive living spaces that felt warm and inviting. "Organization and progression of space were very important in Peter's situation, as was the relationship between public and private areas," he says. "His home needs to work on several levels."

The loft's foyer, which doubles as an art gallery and elegant reception area, is immediate evidence that it does. Heide removed a half-bathroom just inside the front door to make room for a coat closet and expand the owner's bathroom. He also moved the owner's suite entrance from inside the foyer to the rear of the loft, increasing

Zenner's privacy and creating a place for lighted art niches in the foyer. A curved curtain forms the opposite wall, cleverly concealing the laundry area and a space for a small art studio. The shimmering

drapery also sets the stage for the skyline views around the bend.

"There's a real sense of discovery," Heide says of stepping into the loft's open living space, which is framed by windows overlooking Gold Medal Park and the Mississippi River. The kitchen, dining table, and sitting area line the perimeter of the great room, while a custom-built media center anchors the central lounge. It's the ideal spot to hold a meeting, make a presentation, or simply

relax with a movie, says Zenner. When he entertains, guests typically make a beeline for the corner conversation space. "Everybody fights for their favorite chair because each has its own unique view," he says.

Seats also fill quickly at the dining table, where a chandelier with hand-

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designer Michael Crull added fabrics and furnishings both organic and industrial in nature. In the owner's bathroom, tiny oval-shaped floor tiles are abstract representations of river stones. Large wall tiles in the bathrooms and kitchen convey the scale and colors of the earth, water, and sky. Heide chose a handful of diverse finishes, such as the flat-stained walnut cabinets and gleaming blue pearl-granite counters, and repeated them throughout the loft to create contrast and continuity at the same time.

The design team proved highly responsive and resourceful in the face of construction limitations and tight deadlines, says Zenner. The loft's most unique elements—the TV console and

curved ceiling—hide existing mechanical elements, while a sleeping alcove in the master bedroom conceals a drainage pipe. Other clever features include a programmable lighting system, hidden sound system, floor outlets, and a slim alcove around the perimeter of the loft that conceals drapery hardware. "This project displays a remarkable amount of thoughtfulness and depth, and Peter played a big role in that," Heide says.

For his part, Zenner couldn't be more pleased. "I really have it made," he says. He loves having the space to entertain and being free to travel with no worries. He loves being close to the downtown arts scene. A former French horn player who also plays the cello, he's now planning to take cello lessons at the nearby MacPhail Center for Music. Even serendipity took a hand in welcoming him to his new home. When he moved a stainless-steel art panel meant for the foyer to an out-facing wall, he got a surprise gift: a dazzling reflection of the Guthrie Theater's LED marquis. **MH**

MICHELLE BALTUS IS A ST. PAUL WRITER.

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