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Clodagh quietly refines the open spaces of a downtown loft



INTERIOR DESIGN | CLODAGH

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Cold-rolled steel doors from Brooklyn's Studio Dell'Arte slide on four tracks and feature slit grips inspired by a knight's visor. A sectional sofa snakes around the secluded den, beneath a two-way mirror/lamp. The 18-foot walnut slab table seats 26 on benches, which, unlike chairs, "don't look like a conference waiting to happen," the designer Clodagh says.



Opposite, top: Benches from the dining room roll on concealed wheels and perch in the gallery beneath a series by Marco Tirelli. Above the art, a slender black line acts as a register to circulate conditioned air from the ventilation system. Opposite, bottom: A single column in the gallery pairs with a second column, which Clodagh cantilevered to “twist the dimensions.” Below: Clodagh acknowledged the concrete columns’ *wabi-sabi* (“a celebration of natural aging”) by leaving their rough weathering intact, giving them just “a little hair and makeup.”



Below: "The house should maintain itself," says Clodagh of the white concrete table and the microfiber bench, at which she envisions the clients' children harmlessly splattering spaghetti sauce onto "wipe-down heaven" surfaces. Opposite: Discreet base cabinets are tucked beneath the kitchen windows—just one of Clodagh's favorite ways to tuck storage invisibly throughout the space. The concrete countertop gives guests room to mingle over meals, and the dirty dishes go straight to the back kitchen, behind the acrylic cabinetry.





THE FIRST STEP TO PLANNING AN INTERIOR, FOR THE MONOMIAL designer Clodagh, is to channel her inner homemaker. Think: Where will you put the laundry? The dirty dishes? The forks, knives, spoons, and TV? "First you have to make it work," she says, "then you can get hung up on the aesthetics."

Clodagh has handled those practical details in this kid-friendly downtown loft by including wipe-down surfaces, spill-proof fabrics, and a list of non-toxic cleaning products for the clients. Storage built elegantly and invisibly throughout the house, a dining table made to host ambitious parties, and closet space off the master bedroom ensure adult-friendliness, as well.

The Irish-born, self-taught designer wrapped function in a form that "allows the clients' art to sing." She accomplishes that through what she calls "silent design"—an approach that impresses without overwhelming. On close inspection, Clodagh's work reveals unpredictable dimensions, like a slight twist of a column in the gallery, a letterbox-thin clerestory, or a gradual ascent to a dining area up what she calls "slow steps—visual cues that define the space without confining it."

But a glance at the result simplifies the challenge Clodagh encountered in preserving the openness of the 7,500 square feet of raw space. Starting from scratch in a formerly industrial space presents the clients with a daunting list of decisions to make. Clodagh compares confronting the choices to lying bare on a table. "You're stating what you really want, who you really are. It's not always easy."

Fortunately, Clodagh says she considers the design experience to be "a mutual exploration of space and tastes." And the philosophy is evident in her work. In her decades of designing, Clodagh has corralled some of the most talented support in the business. Her clients receive access to everything from the furniture and finishes displayed in her downtown showroom to the crew of contractors capable of defying what might seem impossible to anyone who has commissioned New York City construction. As she puts it, "I'm a travel guide to a strange country."

Without Clodagh as a guide and "translator," many of the loft's details would be inaccessible. Many of the raised rooms conceal HVAC equipment beneath their floors, a major engineering challenge. Plaster walls (the real thing) add texture to the kitchen when located alongside cast concrete countertops and sinks. Steel doors and furniture, custom-built by multiple metalworkers, strike an industrial chord with the concrete columns dominating the structure. Reclaimed antique oak flooring gives a touch of warmth, and the art throughout the space splashes color as it "sings."

To understand Clodagh's belief that "there's no such thing as an inanimate object," it helps to imagine the feeling she hopes a house will one day harness. "I'd like to design a space with no doors and no closets, just little slipways that let you pass from room to room," she says. With its subtle details, skewed dimensions, and gentle divisions, this loft brought her close to that goal. ~ See Resources.



Left: In a child's room, a resin built-in wraps a desk and shelves around the view. Below: The master suite "does what a bedroom should do," says Clodagh, who considers a window seat as essential as a bed. Opposite page: Two sets of frosted-glass doors in the guest bath "separate the loo" from the teak-floored shower, and a frosted-glass panel in the back of the room lets in light but obscures the view to maintain privacy.



