


## bay living

*A loading bay is not the most obvious place to make a home. Designer Kenneth Hirst's apartment in the SoHo district of New York City was once the space where carts, and subsequently trucks, pulled in to deliver the raw materials to a factory making cardboard boxes. The building dates from the early 20th century. The brick walls inside the bay are lined between calf and chest level with a broad buffer of hefty horizontal beams designed to protect the walls, and the reversing trucks, from damage. To say these are distressed would be an understatement. Decades of bad driving have ensured that the timber is scored and scraped and comprehensively battered. The beams are also a signed work of art.*





The façade of this apartment was once an opening for deliveries. Now it is a front door next to a wall of window, which allows natural light into the otherwise windowless space. The kitchen units, *RIGHT* and *INSERT*, are the only fixed feature of an interior where furniture, and even pictures, are regularly rearranged. The horizontal grain of their wood and the glazing bars of the hand-blown opaque glass-fronted wall cabinets reflect the powerful lines of the buffers opposite.









**ABOVE** The furnishings complement the strong architectural presence of the buffer beams. The dining chairs are wide and low, and the wall-mounted CD player follows the rectangular pattern.

**FAR LEFT** At the far end of the apartment where the trucks used to back up, a mezzanine floor has been inserted just beyond the huge beams that supported the winch. The T-shaped structure hides utilities and shelters a small study. The bedroom, above, is surrounded by a low wall, giving it a view over the whole space.



**LEFT** The previous occupant, artist Carla Lavatelli, inscribed the buffer beams with words, signing them off as an artwork before she moved on.

Kenneth Hirst had been looking for a rooftop apartment when a realtor persuaded him to look at this unusual property. Developed in 1976 as part of the SoHo artists in residence scheme, it was being occupied for three to four months of the year by an Italian sculptor, Carla Lavatelli. While she lived there, over the years, she inscribed single words, thoughts, and lines of poetry on the wood. Before she left, she signed the end of the beam. "It's the most expensive work of art I ever bought," laughs Kenneth.

The wall of bare brick and battered beams was not the only relic of the building's past. The opposite wall is new, and divides the original bay into two halves, but against its pristine white plaster towers a V-shaped structure of wood and metal, which once supported a massive winch in the middle of the loading bay. Again, the wood is



split and dented and rough, studded with big metal bolts and braced with metal rods.

"The realtor was right," says Kenneth. "As soon as I walked into the space, I went 'wow.' It was such a dramatic volume, and the beams made such a powerful and striking impact." Guests have been echoing his reaction ever since. Thanks to imaginative lighting, furnishings, and the addition of a mezzanine floor, this giant shoebox-shaped truck park has been transformed into a handsome and practical space for living and entertaining.

Although the space had already been converted to residential use, Carla Lavatelli's cooking and bathing arrangements were far from sophisticated: a camping stove with two hotplates, and a tiny bathroom. The mezzanine floor had already been installed at the far end of the space, like two boxes stacked one on top of the other within the bigger box of the apartment. The smaller box underneath hides the boiler, other utilities, and storage. Upstairs the bedroom is on a platform surrounded by a low wall while the bathroom is enclosed and screened by internal windows of translucent "rice-paper" glass. Here there is very little natural light, but Kenneth has compensated using a series of warm, adjustable light sources, including track lighting and table lamps.

Loading bays do not generally require windows, and this apartment has only one, albeit a big one. The entrance to the bay has been turned into a wall of window, but every other wall is blank. Kenneth Hirst has turned these expanses of wall to design advantage, not by peppering them with pictures, which he prefers to prop on the floor, but by emphasizing the dramatic horizontal "woodscape" of the beams. The kitchen units, in pale anigre wood, are made so that the grain runs horizontally, the wall cupboards have doors divided into three long rectangles, and even the wall-mounted stereo takes up the theme.

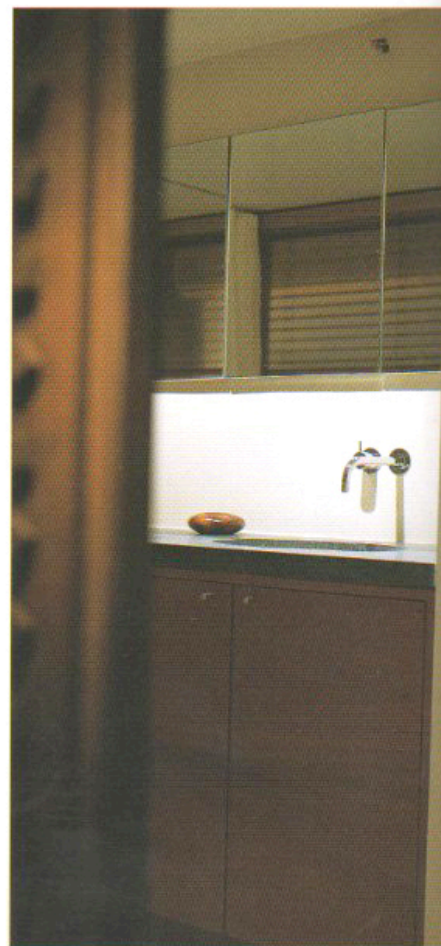
He also takes full advantage of the uninterrupted floor space. The kitchen is the only fixed element, with its central counter and a big



*ABOVE* A sofa tucks snugly against the low wall that surrounds the bedroom at second-floor level. Throughout the apartment there are interesting contrasts between the refinement of some of the architectural additions and the rough-and-ready nature of existing features. No attempt has been made to hide pipework, which is painted bright white to match the walls and ceiling.

*RIGHT* Very little daylight from the wall of window reaches the back of the apartment. In the ground-floor utility room and in the second-floor bathroom, artificial light is a necessity throughout the day. Here, hidden light sources turn necessity to dramatic effect.

*FAR RIGHT* The open bedroom with its view over the apartment is divided from the bathroom by the line of an old beam. Internal windows are made from glass layered with rice paper, providing a translucent screen that filters light and affords some privacy.





*LEFT* The massive slabs of timber that supported the winch are studded with bolts, cracked and dented by years of use. The slim lines of the glazing bars on the windows upstairs look all the more dainty in their rugged company.

wooden cabinet within which slot the fridge, oven, and microwave. Everything else gets moved around and even set at different angles. As a counterpoint to the straight lines, Kenneth uses his ever-expanding collection of shells to make curvaceous displays of what he calls "the most beautiful architectural forms on the planet."

