

AN IDYLL

ONE COUPLE LOOKS TO
THEIR CITY LOFT FOR DESIGN
INSPIRATION WHEN BUILDING
A CONNECTICUT HOME.

space

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Photographs by Norman McGrath



AN ABSTRACT ARTIST AND HER husband loved their airy and spacious Manhattan loft. Remodeled to include ceiling beams and an open gridded space, the loft's ordered structure and classical style appealed to the wife's artistic sensibilities. So when the couple decided to move to Connecticut to raise a family, they began searching for the perfect space—both indoors and out.

Eventually, they found the ideal outdoor space, four sloping acres overlooking a reservoir in New Canaan. The wooded property included a house built in the 1950s, which they decided to tear down so they could build from scratch. And then, short of transplanting their Tribeca loft, the couple had to find a way to translate the open-air design into their new home.

"The existing house was set parallel to the slope, so that the length of the house had a great view. However, the new owners wanted to produce a more meaningful and useful set of outdoor spaces as well as have a view from the house," says Barbara Littenberg, a partner at Peterson/Littenberg Architects, the New York City-based firm that had remodeled the couple's loft. The solution was to build the house so that its length would be perpendicular to the slope.

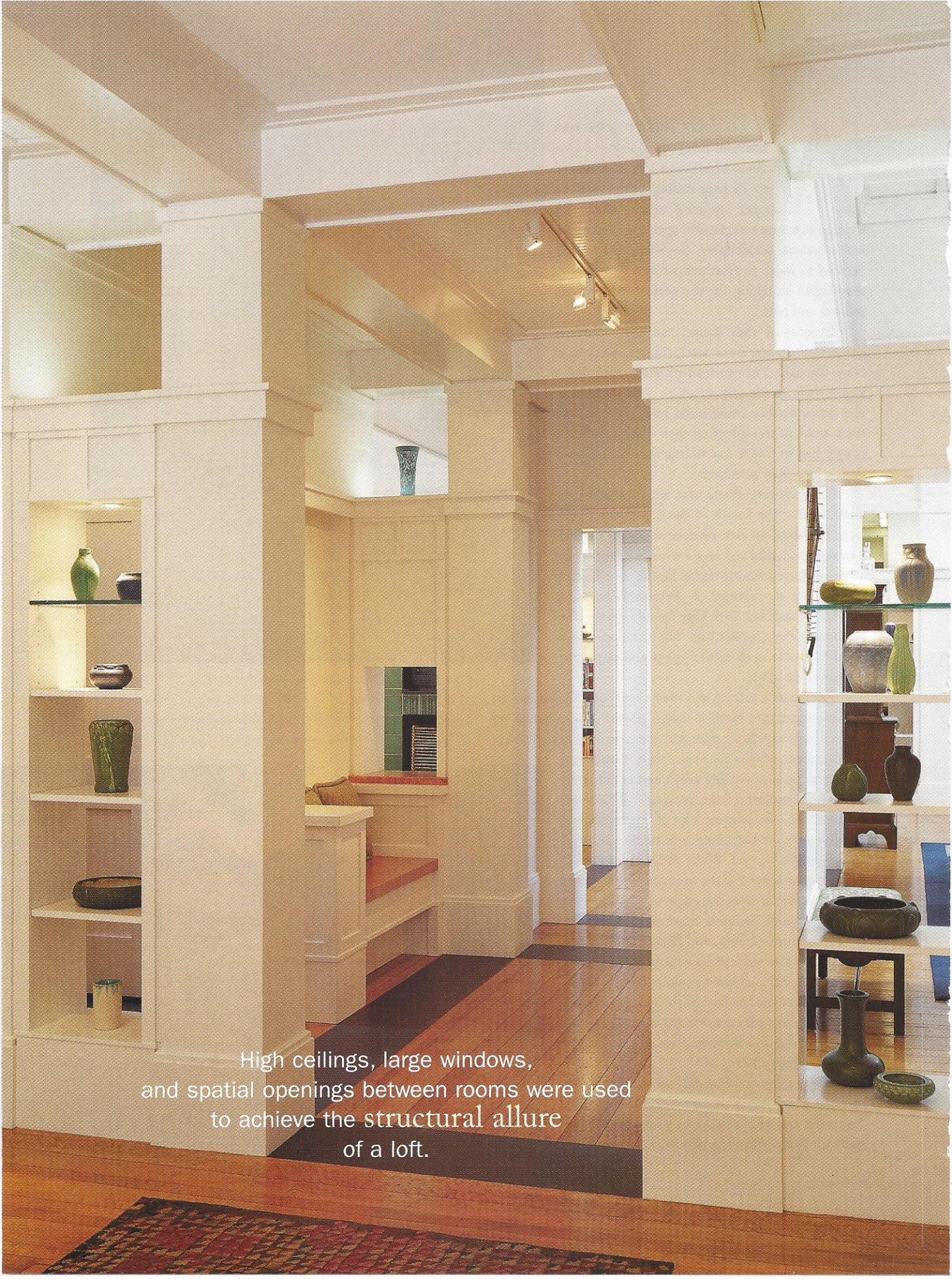
Peterson/Littenberg and their clients quickly fell into an uncomplicated and familiar design phase. "Not only had we worked well together before, but it is also very easy working with a client who is an artist," says Littenberg. "The wife is very visually adept and could really discuss and understand the drawings." The architects and the owners spent a lot of time perfecting the design before beginning construction, to avoid complications later on. While stressing the importance of open space and the need to take advantage of the spectacular view, the owners also wanted the general structure design to draw on the simplicity of barns, farm buildings, and Shaker architecture. The couple also requested a courtyard garden and a lawn where the children could play. As a result, the architects tried to merge the gardens, rooms, and views into a cohesive original work that would fit into the family's lifestyle. Plans for the project began in January 1996.

Today three children play on the great lawn, an artist works in her studio overlooking a garden courtyard, and a father sits on a patio gazing at the reservoir below. From the driveway, the two-year-



The "grid" design ensures that anyone standing in the center of the house can look in any direction and see a cluster of windows (like those in the living room, above). The modest entrance (below) gives no hint of the spaces beyond (opposite page).





High ceilings, large windows,
and spatial openings between rooms were used
to achieve the structural allure
of a loft.

old house looks simple, featuring no adornments and few windows. A covered arcade links the main house to the garage and studio, blocking the rest of the home from view when you arrive at the front door. But step inside, and the interior reveals that the artist and her husband achieved what they set out to do.

Entering through the front door of the main house into the central hallway, you see that the separate rooms merge together as one unified and open space—all have white walls and decor from the same color palette. A guest room, living room, and dining room are located along the right wall of the house. The windows in the sun-filled living room, with its 17-foot-high ceilings, look out onto the great lawn situated on the south side of the house. To the left are the laundry room and mudroom (which leads to the arcade), stairway, family room, and kitchen. And straight ahead, through the library nook, narrow and tall, is the magnificent eastward view.

“The first floor of the house, along with the entire project, is laid out in a series of grids—with the interior and exterior parts working in concert,” says Littenberg, who recalls her client’s edict, “I want to be able to stand in my kitchen and look across the yard and see my paintings in my studio!” In fact, the family room and the kitchen both open into the inner garden courtyard, which is bounded by the covered arcade that leads to the studio.

“We constructed the outdoor space in a geometrical way, just like the buildings. That garden is an outdoor room, and the same axis that runs from the great lawn and through the house runs through the garden as well,” continues Littenberg. To show spatial progression, open outdoor space is alternated with building structure throughout the design. And because the property is entirely on a slope, the architects constructed a series of terraces, then used retaining walls to “step” down the hill. Three patios provide private conversation spots, and all outside areas have a full view of the reservoir at the bottom of the hill.

But the best outdoor view is from the arcade, which divides the family’s public and private space. “The arcade is a wall of the garden ‘room’ and serves to establish the volume of garden space,” says Littenberg. A great volume of space, both indoors and out, was what the couple had in mind when they looked for a new home. With the help of a trusted architect, the family built an amazing future by using their past. 🏠

Peterson/Littenberg Architects, 212-772-7114

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The look-through fireplace connects kitchen (top right) to family room. The abstract garden and courtyard (above), requested by the owners, are compositionally at the center of the site plan (below).

