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T'S A FAMILY AFFAIR

When Fiona Spear needed an architect to design her New York live-work loft

home NEW YORK



OPPOSITE: the linear, 3.25m, cantilevered bookcase emphasises the loft's length, while hiding the raised bedroom pod (with red bedding) from view

ABOVE: organic pebble-like bowls by Tom Ford at Gucci

BELOW: the bookcase houses Geuff's archive of rare photography books. Fona's 60s Pucci velvet cushion adorns the bed

she knew who to ring. Her twin... By Sophie Davies Photographer Geoff Spear



THE ARCHITECT

Australian architect Trudi Scrymgeour co-runs FORM in Sydney, an architectural practice and modern furniture store, where she specialises in residential interiors. After her twin Fiona Spear created FORM's logo identity, Trudi agreed to return the favour by designing a live-work loft for Fiona and her partner Geoff in Manhattan.

But was keeping it in the family nerve-wracking? 'It did run through my mind, "Oh my god, what if they hate it!" but we're too similar in our thinking for that to happen.' Both collect mid-20th-century furniture and have even bought the same items independently, such as 50s Gio Ponti lamps. Geoff and Fiona are also very like-minded, which helped gel the design vision and personalise the usual architect-client relationship. 'There was a lot of pressure to perform. The thought of going to stay with them afterwards and them not being happy with the work I'd done...' Trudi breaks off, shuddering.

Working from a distance was even more of a challenge – 'they had to send photographs, drawings and even a model for me to work from in Oz,' Trudi explains, who only spent half the build on site and never got to see the loft in the flesh beforehand. 'But the advantage was that, as sisters, we knew each other very well and I already understood their professional needs.'

'The way I work is about being very functional, not just visually exciting,' she explains. Her priorities were to clear away clutter, create flexible spaces, and to maximise light across the apartment's inner areas, rather than blocking it with fixed walls. 'I wanted to connect the spaces and not crowd the windows,' she explains.

If anything, the personal nature of the job made it more exciting than other commissions, enthuses Trudi. 'And I got a free ticket to visit my sister in New York!' she jokes.



THE OWNERS

Asking a relative to design your home might be your idea of hell, but for Fiona and Geoff Spear, turning to Fiona's non-identical twin Trudi – an interior designer and architect – was the obvious thing to do. 'We loved her work and besides, she just knows us so well,' says Fiona, a graphic designer. Geoff, a still-life photographer, agrees. 'It wasn't just because she was a relative and gave us a good deal – she really was aligned with our mission.'

Originally from Adelaide, Fiona, 37, met Michigan-born Geoff, 40, six years ago at a photo shoot. They clicked instantly and have been married for four years, moving into their SoHo loft a year ago.

Both self-employed, their goal was to organise a space that was good for living and working in, combining a photo studio, darkroom, and shared office. The solution: 100sq m of raw third-floor AIF warehouse (reserved for artists in residence) in trendy Greene Street – a neighbourhood of old cast-iron buildings, cobbled streets and fab delis.

Key to the design was placing work and 'play' zones at opposite ends of the warehouse, to prevent the office vibe dominating. 'When we're relaxing in the living room we feel very far away from work,' says Geoff. The design cuts both ways, though. 'If we have an inspiration at midnight, we can easily pop down to the office,' says Fiona.

Fiona's favourite retreat is the central, elevated bedroom platform, which feels remarkably private, hidden by the above-eye-level bookcase. 'I can be up there reading and feel pleasantly isolated,' she confesses. The couple preferred to use window light at either end of the loft for working and living room areas – so Trudi came up with the internal, pinky-red bedroom pod with its vibrant bedhead. 'We ○



THIS PAGE: relaxing after work is easy with the help of Florence Knoll lounge chairs, Eames sofa, Arneluce floor lamp and side table

OPPOSITE: the bedroom module is the centerpiece of the space, dividing studio and office (this area) from living quarters



TOP: the fab PH5 lamp by Scandinavian Poul Henningsen demarcates the dining room, while a silk Pierre Cardin fabric wall hanging provides privacy and flexibility, closing off Geoff's studio. The walnut table with metal loop legs was commissioned from Portland designer Tom Ghilarducci to accompany the Eames chairs **ABOVE:** the living-room wall was designed to support the George Nelson shelf unit. The red "tree" sculpture is thought to be a Pantone, picked up at the 26th Street flea market **RIGHT:** plan of loft (1) office (2) photographic studio (3) storage room (4) kitchen (5) bedroom (6) bathroom (7) living room



Geoff and Trudi's bathroom has a black and white tile wall and a white sink.



call it the monolith – you only see the red from outside from a certain angle.

Friends assume the couple hide all their junk, but they're naturally spartan – although Trudi's clever, concealed storage under the bookcase and in a closet room behind the bedroom helps. Minimalism doesn't have to mean uncomfortable though, as the new, gentler loft living proves, making austere design with cozy touches. Despite being so open plan, both agree the loft is very liveable. "There are defined zones, even though the space flows," says Fiona. The loft's brightly coloured panels diffuse the all-white syndrome too, inspired by architects Le Corbusier and Marcel Breuer.

Far from being a source of sibling squabbling, working with Fiona's twin focused the couple's design vision. "Trudi was the deciding factor in everything," says Fiona. "When Geoff and I had divergent ideas, she'd say, 'Let's go with this one!'" Luckily, Trudi's instincts complemented theirs perfectly. "There was one lighting store I'd been to 20 times looking for the right studio light," recalls Geoff. "Trudi came down and within seconds she saw this amazing 70s industrial strip light I'd never even noticed."

Ironically, the biggest debate was over the smallest room – the bathroom. Fiona and Geoff had been considering grey flooring, but Trudi persuaded them to go with little black-grooved glass tiles instead, although plans for a vertical shelving unit to match the bedroom faltered. It's now Geoff's favourite room: "I love the porcelain basin by Javier Tapador. It's about three inches deep and floats in the air. And the slivers of glass let in beautiful, soft light."

So, any tips for collaborating with a family architect? "Use their talents, don't jump in too much," suggests Fiona.

All three are delighted with the result. "We still look at each other and go, 'We love this place!'" grins Fiona.