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Snug as
a Pug
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Because

it's at the back of the loft, the couple's bedroom is windowless, but it's hardly lightless: "It's really nice to lie in bed and see the way the light flies up over the top of the kitchen wall," Monnahan says. He kept the room spare, using a B&B Italia bed that matches the living room sofas (to underscore the notion that the rooms are interconnected). Over the bed is LeBlanc's own photograph of Cape Cod. Its sandy tones find mates in the Pendleton blanket.

Throughout the apartment, the couple balanced precision with a healthy respect for imperfection. Their concrete floor bears rust stains from exposed rebar and tire tracks from when construction workers rode their equipment over the slab. The bathroom's Mexican milk glass tiles weren't molded. Instead, sheets of glass were scored, then cracked, giving each tile a slightly different outline.

Irregular or not, the tiles help form the most serene part of the loft. Its centerpiece, a Japanese-style soaking tub, feels like part of the architecture, rather than a mere appliance, in part because Monnahan avoided extraneous hardware. In place of an overflow drain, he created a sluice so that the tub can spill over into the shower. That arrangement, Monnahan says, also means that you can step out of the tub wet and dry off in the shower (rather than dripping on the floor). Simplicity, in his hands, is the mother of invention. ☪

See Resources, last pages.

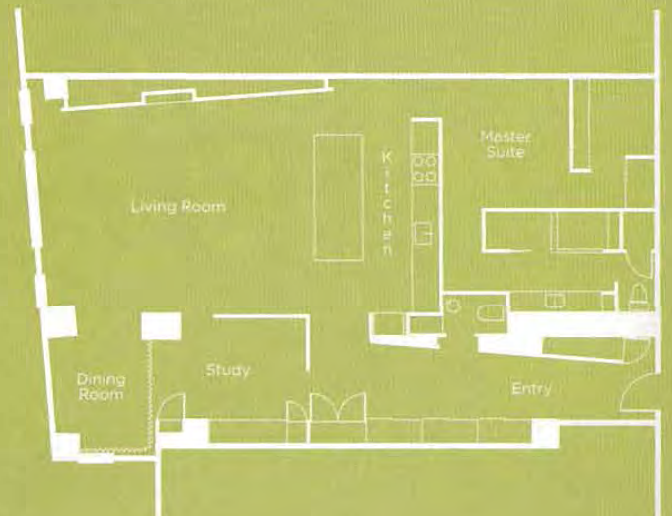
WHAT THE PROS KNOW



In progress

Fitting Tiles

If the couple's bathroom—with its 30-inch-deep tub—looks particularly serene, that's in part because not a single tile in the room was cut. Avoiding cuts makes tiled surfaces seem planned rather than haphazard, structural instead of superficial, says Monnahan. To facilitate the no-cut policy, he obtained sheets of tile long before his builder arrived at the site. He carefully measured the sheets (which include spaces for grout), then laid out every surface based on those dimensions. As an example, the tub enclosure is precisely nine tiles wide, and the overflow sluice is two wide and three deep. Getting the ceiling to line up with the tiles was no problem: Although the contractor installed the drywall ceiling before the walls were tiled, he made it a hair higher than was necessary, then used skim-coat plaster to bring it down to the top of the highest tile.



In the bathroom, the simplicity of hardware by Arne Jacobsen complements the clean lines of Monnahan's architecture. He chose a silver grout, he says, to emphasize the whiteness of the tiles. The bathtub overflows into a sluice that sends the water to the floor of the adjacent shower. Opposite: Bedroom comforts include Calvin Klein sheets, a Frette coverlet, a Pendleton blanket, boiled-wool pillows and half-inch-thick felt floor tiles. The *Lens* side table is from B&B Italia; the photograph is by Keith LeBlanc, the painting by Claudia Aronow.





For

years, Kelly Monnahan, an architect, and Keith LeBlanc, a landscape architect, watched the transformation of Boston's South End—where they have lived together since the early 1990s—with professional detachment. Though new buildings were going up all around them, they had no plans to leave their cozy apartment, on the parlor floor of an old brick row house. Besides, after designing a weekend place on Cape Cod with water views from every room (*MH*, July/Aug '03), the men didn't need their in-town flat to knock anyone's socks off.

But a couple of years ago, the building boom began to have an impact. On-street parking, which had always been easy to find, got scarce. So when a new loft building, by Boston architect Doug Dolezal, began selling parking spaces to nonresidents, LeBlanc decided to check out the garage. And while he was there, he figured, why not take a look at some apartments? That same winter, the cold began to get to LeBlanc, a native of Louisiana. In their barely insulated apartment, the men had to light a fire every night and wear sweaters to stay warm; in the new building, residents looked comfortable in shorts and T-shirts.

Eventually, the couple figured, they were either going to have to do a major renovation or move to a place where the infrastructure worked "and spend the same money on design," says Monnahan. The Dolezal building, with new systems and large metal-framed windows, was the perfect setting. The couple wasn't looking for views—which their Cape Cod house provides in spades—but a place where Monnahan could create dramatic interior vistas. In the 1,600-square-foot unit they chose in the building, a small foyer opened onto a mostly undivided loft space (with a small bedroom and bath against the inside wall). Monnahan closed up the passageway to the bedroom and created

a long entry hall sheathed in a translucent plastic called LightBlocks. The hall leads to a small study that doubles as a guest room. Along the way, the LightBlock panels, backlit to dramatic effect, hide oversized storage spaces.

Then he created a new opening to the bedroom at the long side wall of the apartment (above). Letting that long wall continue uninterrupted past the kitchen emphasizes the presence of space beyond. For the same reason, it helps that the kitchen cabinets stop three feet below the ceiling. Finally, using a gentle angle suggested by the shape of the building, Monnahan created a media wall with the TV positioned like a fireplace: The "hearth" is a 20-foot-long steel shelf. To the left of the screen is a sliding panel (also made of LightBlocks) that conceals audio and video equipment.

Dramatic as it is, the transformation from raw loft to open apartment wasn't especially pricey. The couple didn't do a thing to the existing concrete floor. And they kept all of the original kitchen cabinets—adding new doors (from Ikea) to make the row of cabinets appear more substantial. Perhaps most ingeniously, they also kept the maple kitchen island but added a top and two sides of Bianco Statuario marble—like a stone slipcover. The same marble appears next to the television and atop the vintage Herman Miller coffee table base. Repeating materials serves Monnahan's architectural goals: "When your ceiling is the same color as your walls is the same color as your furniture, you start to see the planes in space," he says. The restrained palette also helps to satisfy the couple's desire for a restful retreat. Says LeBlanc, "It's calming to come home to."

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