

Architecture

MINNESOTA

Housing For Lifestyles



When he first looked at the old Washburn Mill on the riverfront in downtown Minneapolis with his clients, Jim Dayton, AIA, principal, James Dayton Design, Ltd., Minneapolis, remembers thinking the space was the ultimate blank slate. "It's a huge concrete bunker of a building," Dayton says, "and it had sat empty for years. The wind whistled through broken windows, graffiti was everywhere and [squatters] had settled into the space in makeshift housing."

Three years later, Dayton's clients, an empty-nester couple who left a comfortable suburban home for a more dynamic life in the city, are ensconced in a luxurious space carved from 3,000 square feet of this former General Mills laboratory and utility building. "The clients were very engaged in the idea of creating a clean-lined, downtown living space," Dayton says, "but they encouraged us to walk the line between loft and luxury apartment. They did not want to recreate their suburban house, but they weren't comfortable with the hardcore concrete shell or with the kind of hard-edged materials often associated with lofts."

Dayton's plan flows around a maple cube in the center of the space that houses the dressing room. "Everything else reacts to and feeds off

of that maple block," he explains. To one side, the kitchen opens into a spacious living/dining area and terrace with river views; the adjacent media room doubles as a guest room. The master suite fills the opposite end of the space. Dayton used sliding frosted-glass doors throughout the apartment to separate the rooms; left open, the apartment is transformed into an airy, sun-soaked loft.

Although highly finished materials like bamboo flooring and maple paneling give the space a luxury baseline, Dayton also gave a nod to the building's roots. The new ceiling plays peekaboo with the original concrete surface, occasionally revealing just a few patches of concrete. "You get a feeling for the original building," Dayton says, "without living in the bunker."

"This was a tough old building with zero infrastructure," he continues. "You want to talk about 'before' and 'after'? Well, this was the most incredible 'before' I've ever seen. And I think the clients are pretty happy with the 'after.'"

Washburn Mill Loft
Minneapolis, Minnesota
James Dayton Design, Ltd.
Minneapolis, Minnesota



*Design team (from left to right):
 Jim Dayton, AIA, Scott Eloffson.*

