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His, Hers, Theirs
Shedding light on Roger Hale's and Nor Hall's one-of-a-kind design styles (and their unique living arrangement).

What's hot /not in interior design

Style Scout:
Design rules that are OK to break

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The couple relaxes in Roger's favorite spot: a natural light-wrapped corner. All of the loft's finishes were selected to reflect that light.

HIS, HERS, THEIR'S

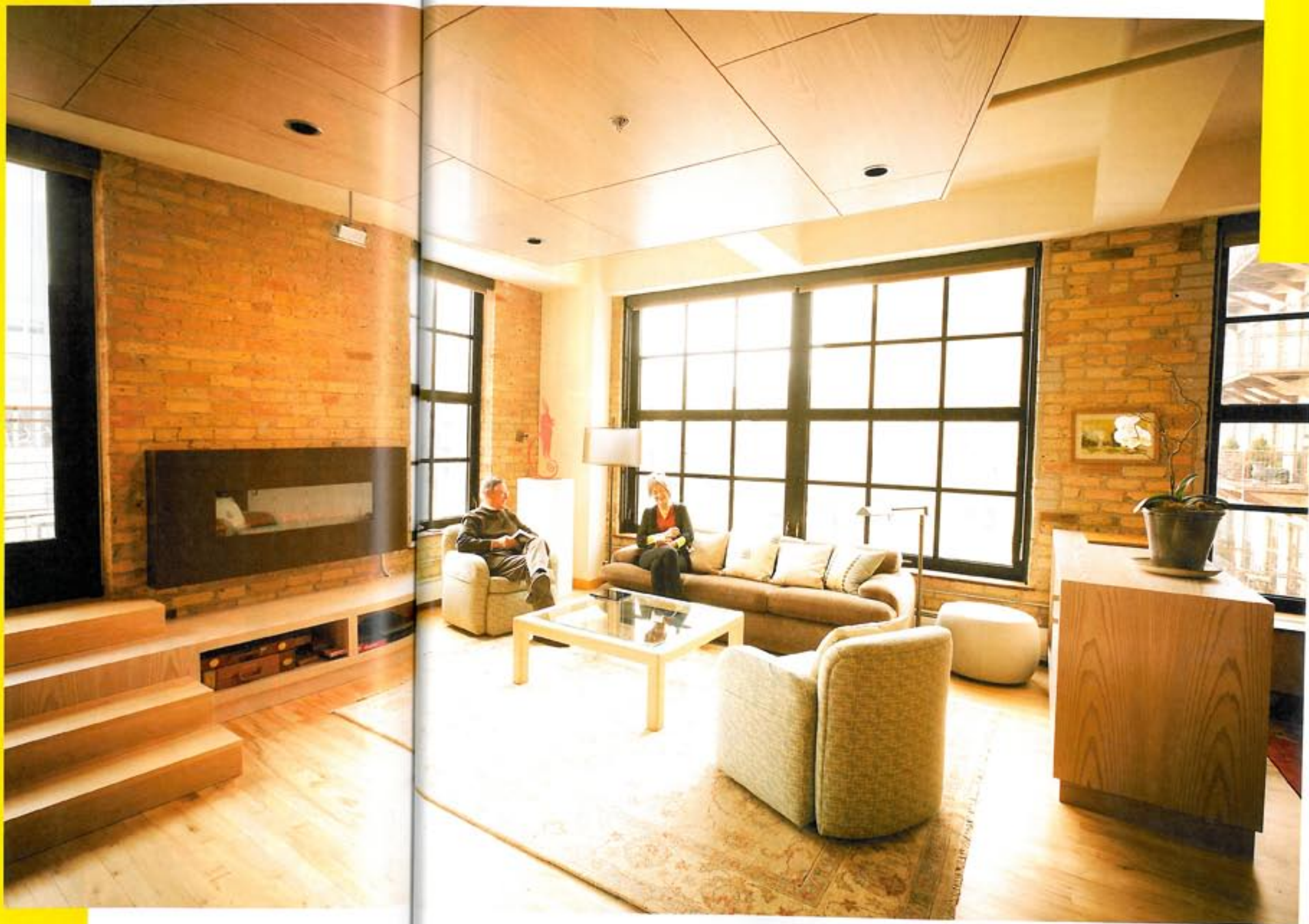
Married 22 years, Roger Hale and Nor Hall share everything except an urban address. But Roger's downtown Minneapolis loft reflects their light-filled collaboration.

→ Light is a force both seen and felt. In physical spaces, it dissolves the indoor-outdoor division, reveals nuances (and unsightly deficits) and freshens like a breeze through open windows.

In a successful relationship's emotional space, light reads as a feeling, a sunny ease that's especially palpable to those who've had the light fade or experienced the dark days of divorce or disagreement. (Wow! They genuinely respect and like each other. Double shots of their Kool-Aid, please.)

(cont'd on p. 10)

by kitty shea / photos by sara rubinstein



It's tempting to sit in the southern-soaked light of Roger Hale's fifth-floor unit in downtown Minneapolis's North Star Lofts and connect dots: His 1,800-square-foot man cave is open, spare and alight with the practical energy of a retired CEO (of Tennant Company, manufacturer of surface cleaning solutions) whose leadership has extended to many "-ships": directorships at St. Paul Companies, Valspar Corporation, Donaldson Company, U.S. Bancorp and Dayton-Hudson Corporation (now Target Corporation); chairmanships of Public Radio International, the Governor's Work Force Development Council and, currently, Ploughshares Fund, which aims to reduce nuclear weaponry; memberships on the Metropolitan Airports Commission and—wait for it—to Chess Castle of Minnesota, of which Roger, whom the United States Chess Federation rates in its top third of member players, is the benefactor.

The dots could end with a period—"business bigwig downscales to brightly lit loft, The End"—were it not for the presence/absence of Eleanor "Nor" Hall, the St. Paul writer, psychotherapist and theater artist Roger married some two decades ago but with whom he's only lived in their Osceola, Wis., weekend home, in joint accommodations while traveling and out of his suitcases in her Mac-Groveland twin home for a spell while his loft was being remodeled.

Hale. Hall. His place. Her place. Their place. It's a bit of a "Huh!" but their arrange-



ment, and the careful intent behind it, casts light on society's deadbolt view of togetherness. If you need quiet (or noise), order (or chaos), proximity to X (or distance from Y), or even—introverts rejoice!—just space of your own, and your partner freely obliges, won't yours be a brighter presence in the relationship? Roger is obviously, per his vita, a visionary. For her part, Nor has a Ph.D. in the history of consciousness, presented her "Architecture of Intimacy" research at a marriage conference in Dallas and is, with Kira Obolensky (co-author of Sarah Susanka's *The Not So Big House* book series), shopping to publishers a book about shared versus solo spaces. Clearly, Roger and Nor's setup isn't some reactive real-estate response to towels on the bathroom floor.

"Books have been a dominating theme everywhere he's lived," says Jocelyne Hale of her dad. "He always surrounds himself with objects that represent intellectual curiosity."

"Magician of a plaster guy" Darril Otto (Dayton's description) conjures a pretend Cor-Ten, or rusted steel, backdrop.

"They had both come out of fiery first marriages and I think what is such a relief to them—to all of us—is that they found such a courteous, loving, supportive partnership," says Jocelyn "Jocelyne" Hale, Roger's eldest daughter and executive director of the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis. "With their high level of support and trust in each other, the way they live just feels so natural."

Jocelyne and her two sisters grew up in a "charming house with a white picket fence" in Kenwood, Roger's childhood neighborhood. She was in eighth grade when they moved into a south-facing Italianate-style

mansion on Lake of the Isles during Roger's self-dubbed "lavish phase." Of his lifestyle at the time, Roger says, "I enjoyed it and took part in it actively, but it wasn't ruling my life. When I divorced, I had had enough of that life." Upon marrying Nor, "My life went off in a different direction," he says, adding dryly, "not that I was growing a beard and living in a hut somewhere."

No, he was living in a Nicollet Island condo up a shout from the Burlington Northern railroad tracks, where he planned to reside for a year post-divorce. He ended up staying 23 years, 20 of them while married to Nor, who was raising her daughter, Deirdre, in a carriage house below Summit Hill in St. Paul.

Just as light falls differently at different times of the day and year, so too will time change the couple's respective housing needs. Now grandparents to 13 kids ages one to 16, Roger and Nor were thinking ahead when they bought the loft, attracted to its size, light and layout, the latter free of the stairs that made Roger's Nicollet Island pad more spryly navigable 23 years ago. Nor's family has "good longevity genes," says Roger, plus he's 13 years her senior. When he passes away, goes the thinking, Nor will make the loft her home. Thus, during its remaking, "I regularly deferred to Nor," he says, and not just because of her eventual



Of her separate residence and the curiosity their marital living arrangement tirs, Nor says, "People are intrigued. Women want to do it, but men are acinated."

Nor's a true academic, so her home is a very studious environment," observes architect Jim Dayton. "Roger's is more artistic and museum based. Like most couples, theirs isn't a singular voice."

occupancy. "She has the better aesthetic; I could have just moved in."

The whole of Nor's St. Paul home is a professor's study, says Jim Dayton, AIA, of James Dayton Design in Minneapolis, with whom the couple collaborated architecturally on Roger's loft. "[Nor's home] is about books and travel and overt collections from all over the world: masks, figures, blankets, color, tribal art," says Dayton. "It's organic and earthy and has a handmade vibe to it." Nor's synopsis? "My aesthetic is much more occupied by objects than Roger's."

Nor's voice indeed influenced the outcome of the loft, says Dayton, whom Roger knows from serving together on the Walker Art Center board, of which Roger has been president twice. His second stint was in the middle of the "More Than a Museum" capital campaign that ended up raising \$100 million.

"Practicality and use-of-space efficiencies were Roger's interests," recalls Dayton. "Nor came to life when we were talking about the more tactile aspects. Roger would say, 'Oh, I don't care about carpet.' She walked on the carpet samples in her bare feet."

Design-wise, what's on the floor ultimately acquiesces to what's on the ceiling. Dayton's "deliberate procession" toward the light is a larch plywood sail that ascends from the entry, ribbons across the ceiling, melts into like-wood bookcase, cabinets and walls, and then expands before, as Dayton puts it, "You get this ta-da moment when the city view unfolds before you." The sweep of millwork unifies the open floor plan's smattering of "rooms" and hangs a high-art cloud of larch over otherwise-exposed mechanicals. While all this ta-da-ing is unfolding, notes Dayton's project manager Angie Varpness, Associate AIA, the sail also does the essential work of providing a place for electric ceiling lights, something the original space lacked.

A space this well lit, from both switches and natural sources, puts the pressure on the craftsmen, as does Dayton's sleek design. Says general contractor Jay Stills, who, with Sheff Otis, runs Urban Rebuilders of Minneapolis, "The fewer the trim components, the more difficult a job is. When you don't have multiple layers of trim details: the crown moldings, the parting strips, the base boards with caps; when you strip those down to one simple line or detail, then every little outside corner, every line, suddenly become important and have to be exact." Stills continues, "The idea is that they become invisible. The only time you see them is when they're done wrong."

That same unforgiving light, however, awakens art. Dayton knew design deference to Roger's collection was in order. "Someone

told me once you should never use the word 'curate' unless you're a curator, but I felt his [Nicollet Island] place was really well curated," he says. Each pick on display in the loft has Roger's or Nor's fingerprints on it and heart in it. "None of this stuff was bought by a decorator," says Roger. The collection is comprised of Jim Dine prints purchased in the 1960s that have appreciated wildly in value; old prints that belonged to his parents; a life-size, blue-spotted snow leopard sculpture bought at auction; a lion-motif rug scooped up in Hong Kong; and a tiny, treasured oil painting of a tree alongside an aged photo of the same. Driving along the North Shore with his grandmother, six-year-old Roger pointed toward a scene and announced, "That's my tree." Some 50 years later, his aunt found the painting, a strikingly exact replica of the little boy's tree.

There are few trees outside the grown man's windowpanes; just sky and skyline, daytime bright and evening fade. No matter: The view is most often to his back. Roger's favorite spot is his chair in that cornered window. "I like looking at this space," he says, gesturing toward his loft with its bleached finishes and relationship peace. "I like the light."

Twin Cities freelancer Kitty Shea writes about homes and how people live from her little red house in the semi-country.



Vitals

Architectural style: Adaptive reuse of textile mill into multi-family residential

Year built: 1925 as North Star Woolen Mill; 1998-1999 redeveloped into North Star Lofts

Architect: James Dayton Design

Contractor: Urban Rebuilders

Building pedigree: National Register of Historic Places

Building size: 36 condominiums spread among seven floors

Materials present: Concrete, exposed brick

Main materials used: Larch wood, Cor-Ten, hand-made ceramic tile, travertine stone

Bedrooms: 2

Baths: 2

Total sq. footage: 1,800

Total cost: \$900,000 to purchase; \$350,000 to remodel

Nearby: Guthrie Theater, Mill City Museum, Stone Arch Bridge, Mill Ruins Park



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