

Blue Pickle : A Situation Makes a Place

They Had Guts!

Yes, That's what Tricia and Danny had. They claimed that they have finally found what they were looking for.



We were all standing in a dimly light, abandon office floor. In a circle: the building owner and relator, my client - Tricia and Danny, myself and a builder. Every one was very serious about the deal: sellers wanted to SELL, builders claimed "anything could be done!", and I was seeing the space for the first time.

There was actually nothing to see, it was too dark and there was no electricity. A flashlight finally appeared and I was given the grand tour by the relator... "the space we have to offer is, here, where the toilets are, a little bit down that way and over to the left some, and as you can see...there are no windows."



"Somewhere, new holes in the building and this fantastic tower right in our own back yard!"

Tricia and Danny have been living in a loft for many years, and for the past six months, been seriously looking for a space to buy. Everything they saw on the market was too conventional and really just an apartment the seller claimed was a loft. Nothing appealed to them, and I can understand why. Then they found this opportunity. There is an attraction to the alternative living style of a loft, and many will take great risks in achieving it - my clients.

This building, properly "The Phoenix Building", was converted into lofts in the early 1990's. The second floor, which we were on, was finished as office space - then the dot-com bust!, and it remained empty. The building owner was considering demolishing everything on the floor and converting it, also to lofts - He needed buyers.

The situation.

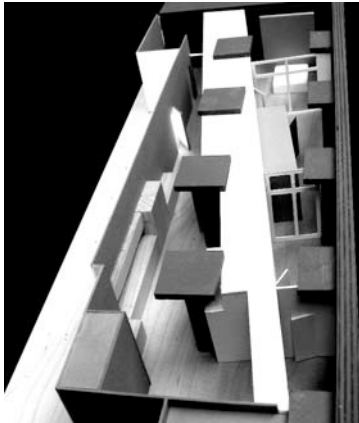
As we left the meeting, Danny pointed out where the new holes in the concrete walls could be and the fantastic "industrial yard and tower" which would become their rear yard view. "Pretty cool, ha. Tricia and I are getting married soon and this will be our first house." said Danny.

At the time I was very concerned for the risks they were about to take and remained that way throughout the entire project. Now that it is over, I can only smile - Tricia and Danny had guts!

Why, Why Not

What made this crazy project so desirable? Well, for the same price of a new 1,200 s.f. loft (apartment) this project would be 2,200 s.f. and actually be a loft. What made the economics work, was the real estate; the worst space in the building - cheap. Lots of toilets, advantage or hinderance? Now windows - let's see what we can do. The only reason not to make the deal was, if the authorities would not permit it or if the building could not be pulverized with additional holes. This was the main task to resolve in the design process. Both the City and the structural engineer reviewed the design proposals and agreed that it was feasible. Tricia and Danny made their offer on the space and the project was on.

Ikea: the New Sweat Equity



Model

I remember when my wife and I bought our first home in the Bay Area, the year was 1989 and everyone was doing it, sweat equity. But today, in the 00's, there is no such thing. After buying a first house, there is no money left to fix anything - nothing to sweat over.

This project was budget driven, and I knew sweat equity would be required to make it happen. From the beginning, every piece of cabinetry, sinks, faucets, towel bars, coat hooks and anything else that gets bolted to a wall would be Ikea, assembled and installed by their loving hands. No special training required, just patience and time. What resistance!

“But it’s so cheap” they said; uninformed and with an attitude. I explain, “Yes it is inexpensive, mainly because modern furniture finally has become available to the general population through the world wide mass-production. A concept developed in the 1920's and made affordable by Ikea in the 00's.” They were still reluctant about it until they say the cabinetry estimate from the builder.

The Ikea, sweat equity approach would save them \$17,000. They could do the work themselves and keep the project on budget. Done.

Making the Best of It

The Design was still in progress, but demolition of the office toilet core was complete and the space could finally be seen.

Designing within the area of the existing toilet core was actually an advantage. We were guaranteed that drains and water could easily be tapped into, reducing the huge expense of new plumbing in an existing building. Shafts for the kitchen and bathroom exhaust vents were also located. Very practical issues.

So, with 2,200 s.f. what do you do?

- Open loft living
- Outdoor space
- Home theater - 8' x 10' screen
- Office with potential access directly from the corridor
- 2 Bedrooms
- 2 bathrooms
- Laundry Area
- Large kitchen area
- Dining Area
- Storage rooms and cabinets

No White

It is always interesting to notice when a project begins to take on a life of its own. This time it happened when we were seriously considering all the materials. I had to completely rethink the project after Tricia mentioned that white was not a preferred color.



Plan

The space had always been conceived as a piece of sculpture, which provides for all the living and utility needs of the loft, and was always approached as white for maximum light reflectance. Within this white piece of sculpture, the kitchen is a point of focus, accentuated by color. Very simple.

“No white.” O.K. ...

It took a day or so to recognize a meaningful direction for the material pallet of the project. A new approach was needed that would complement the sculpture of the space and enhance the light in the Loft. It happened one day in the garden.



Blue Pickle

I did not have to go far to find it, I just had to open my eyes and see the Blue Pickle - a succulent. What did Webster have to say:

A plant adapted to arid conditions and characterized by fleshy water-storing tissues what act as reservoirs.

Tricia and Danny’s favorite color was blue, the design of the loft consolidated all the utility intensive spaces (kitchen, bath and laundry) into a long pod, just like what I was looking at. Why not, the Blue Pickle.

The Big Event

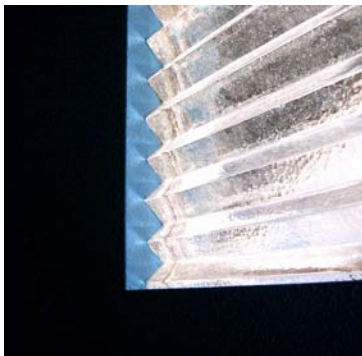
For some time, the construction progressed in the dark. The frame of the Blue Pickle pod was taking shape, but what was of real interest was light, air and a view. Every time we went to the job site it was in anticipation of the day. It finally happened. Fantastic! Railroad tracks, shipping cranes, a transmission tower and street noise was never so welcomed.



The Opening

Light, the Neighborhood and Glass

Undeniably, it is the City of Oakland who has lead the way in supporting the live/work movement. In the early 1980’s, Oakland developed zoning regulations which allowed working artists to legally work and live in the same space. It sounds simple, but it was a complicated issue for the building department to deal with because of “grey area”, and overlap of commercial and residential life safety issues. What resulted was the largest working artists community in the Bay Area - Cool!



Artist - John Lewis Glass Studio

Now, what Tricia and Danny were doing is considered the second wave of the Live/Work phenomena - more live less work, but still revitalization. So where were the real artists going? First it was West Oakland, then Jack London Square, and the Colosseum Area. There was a migration south and we were

told it is now, Pearmain Street. Over the years I have attended the Open Studios events in Oakland, but had never heard of of this area.

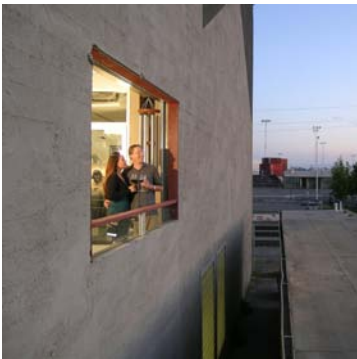


Indoor - Outdoor

It would be nice to incorporate some artwork by a local Oakland artist, so we went hunting - on a budget. It was an enriching experience to see the bohemian life style of the working artist which started to the Live/Work movement. There were many, but the glass work of John Lewis could be very useful. We purchased a few remnant items from him and installed them into the bathroom wall.

Confusing?

For months there was no separation between the interior and exterior space. It was a little confusing because everyone assumed that the new holes in the exterior concrete walls, were the windows. A normal assumption. But in order to create the outdoor space, floor to ceiling glass walls were planned separating the Blue Pickle and the new holes in the building. This was the outdoor space, an interior projection of a balcony with a waterproofed floor and overhead cover - an interior exterior.



Home

It still remains confusing, but works. As a testimonial to this, I remember when the window installer completed his work; were were talking in the outdoor room. He said to me "I have seen the other balconies in this building, why didn't you design one for this loft?"

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