





REFINED RECYCLING

Turning a run-down Boulder storefront into a sophisticated living space—amid a variety of client- and self-imposed restrictions—proved to designer Kari Whitman that nothing is impossible.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CALVIN BAINES

at the west end of Pearl Street in Boulder, just beyond the bustling shopping and dining of the pedestrian-only section, sits a historic storefront, a former grocery that opened in 1901 and served miners and other locals for more than 30 years. In the intervening span of time, it was used for other commercial purposes, but it wasn't until designer Kari Whitman was hired that it truly came to life.

Whitman doesn't mince words when it comes to describing her first impressions: "It was a mess. It was a disaster. It was just old drywall, bad floors. It was disgusting," she says. "It was in very bad shape, but you could see, peeping through the awful shape, a little diamond in the rough."

They cleaned it up and stripped the space down to one big, open room. The vision that the client asked Whitman to realize was two separate sitting/sleeping spaces with a kitchen connecting them. His style preference was masculine and industrial but warm—someplace to live comfortably. He wanted to retain the exposed ceilings but still required privacy for each bed/bath, all in 2,300 square feet.

Oh, and there was one more thing: no drywall—not on the exterior walls and not within the space. One might suppose that it's a credit to Whitman's imagination that she never once uttered the words, "We can't do that." Although, when it came to explaining her vision for construction and various pieces of furniture that she wanted to build and install, she heard it plenty of times from other people.

Her first stop was an architectural salvage company aptly called Olde Good Things. "I found this prewar building in Brooklyn that was getting demolished, and Olde Good Things was salvaging all the windows," she says. "These windows were 102 inches tall. And I thought, 'Oh my God, I can make walls out of these.'"



JUST HANGING AROUND

Designer Whitman's vision comes through in the oversized sofa and ceiling suspended seating—upholstered in fabric by Donghia—as well as the repurposed fishing net light. The Marilyn Monroe image is by artist Stikki Peaches. The rugs here and in the kitchen are from Aga John.

Repurposed materials make appearances throughout the space; Whitman estimates 85 percent of what's there is something old made new. In addition to sourcing a variety of items on 1stdibs.com and at French flea markets, Whitman was quick to see potential in other ordinary objects. Vintage doorknobs serve as towel hooks. Wallcoverings in the bedrooms are made of leather belts. (Whitman asked everyone she knew to give up their unused accessories before she discovered a company, EcoDomo, that does this.) In the master are train headlamps, suspended from the ceiling to cast circles of light. Another hanging light fixture adjacent to the oversized sofa began life as a fishing basket, the netting painted black and surrounding an Edison-style bulb.

All of this reuse was in line with the desires of the owner. "He's a tree hugger, like me," says Whitman. Where they diverged in their sensibilities, however, was in relation to color. Both Whitman and the client's wife pushed for some red, maybe purple, but he was adamant in his preference for understated, dark neutrals. "I think it turned out great," Whitman says. "Light bounces a little bit



POINTS OF LIGHT

Four different bulb shapes make up the dramatic fixture lighting the kitchen island. Whitman designed all of the drawer pulls and the island edging, which are embedded with shotgun shell heads for a masculine touch. Stools from Restoration Hardware.



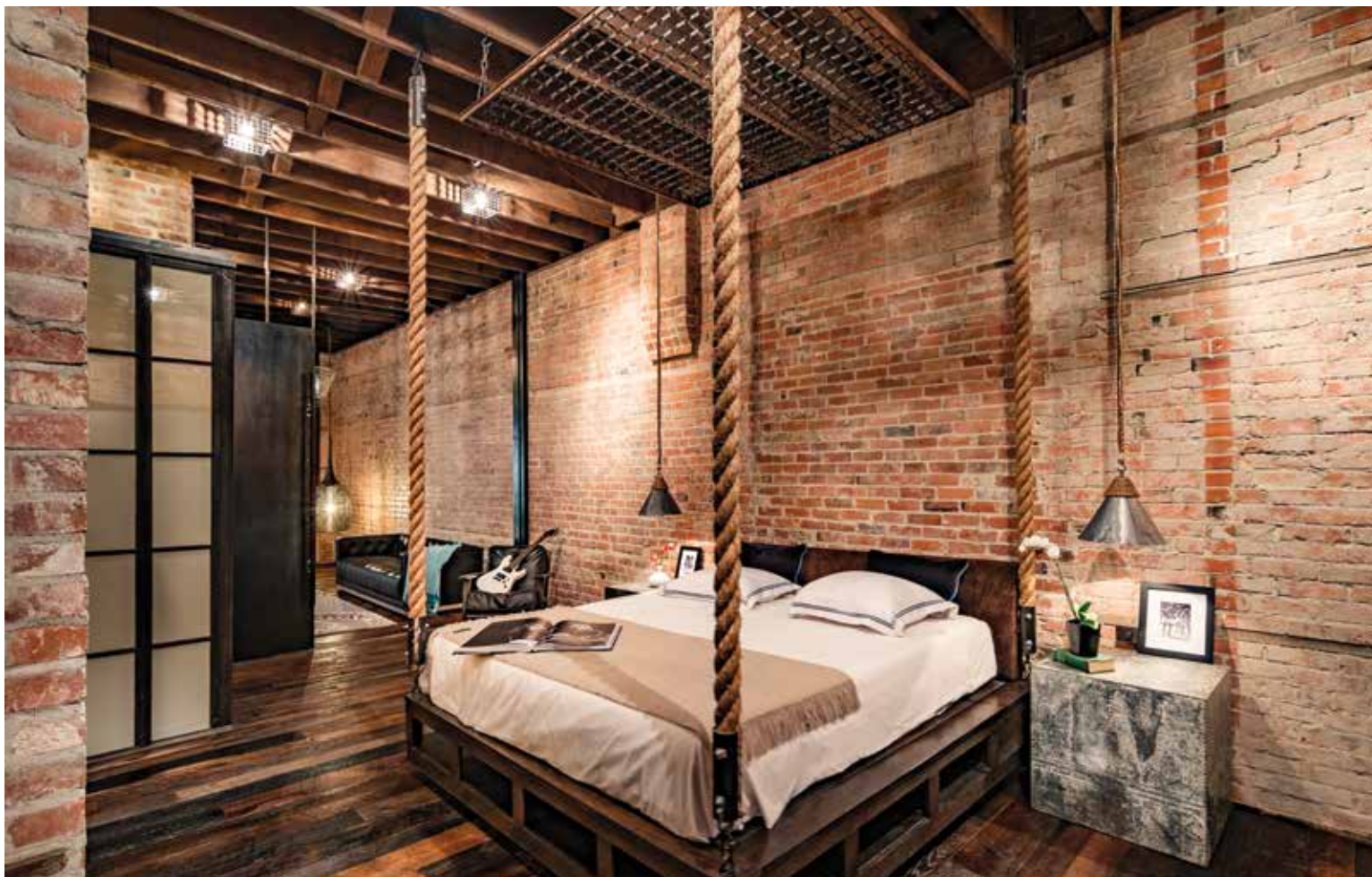


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GLASS CEILING

The windows used as walls and above the shower in the master bath were salvaged from a prewar building in New York. The large pendant and tiered lamps over the sink are from 1stdibs.com. The wall is a slab of Turkish leathered limestone. Mirrors from Arteriors.

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LIVING WALL

On the guest side of the home, live plants take the place of wallpaper or paint; they are fed by steam from the shower. To the left of the dual sinks are drawers faced with suede, which is also used on the headboard of the bed. Fixtures from Waterworks.



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ROCK-A-BYE

The guest bed hangs from the ceiling—the steel frame required a crane to place. Floors throughout the space are recycled teak. The side tables were sourced from a French flea market. Lampshades are metal strips folded into a cone shape by Whitman. Linens from Frette.

RESOURCES

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more. It really lets the space speak for itself instead of trying to make it speak.”

The exception to the color embargo is the living wall, rich greenery—lavender, sage and elf moss—that literally lives in both bathrooms, fed even in Colorado’s dry climate by steam from the showers and moisture from the evaporative cooling system that keeps the temperature comfortable in the warmer months.

There are a few new pieces among the vintage finds, many of them designed by Whitman, who estimates that she designs at least 90 percent of the new furniture she uses in any job. “I’m bored seeing the same things everywhere, not being able to find what I love,” she says. The sofa in this home is a perfect example. “I love huge, crazy couches. I always have. And a lot of times you can’t find that.” Even realizing her own designs can prove challenging. “I’ll talk to a fabricator and they’ll say, ‘Well, that’s just not how it’s done.’ But, by who? Who makes that decision? We’re trendsetters; we’re not trend followers here.”

Not that she doesn’t ask a lot of those who choose to

forge paths with her. There’s a giant slab of Turkish stone in the shower that had to be installed without brackets. “I called probably 30 slab guys to come and put that slab on the wall. Nobody understood it.” The beds in this home are made of 16-gauge rolled steel and required a crane to place as well as “getting an engineer that didn’t think I was crazy,” Whitman says, referring to her decision to take one of the colossal beds and suspend it from the ceiling along with the loveseats that hang in the front windows. “I mean, when you can’t use a lot of colors, you’ve got to do something else. I like the big statements, big lights, big mirrors. It’s fun.

“I think it’s really important for people to know that recycled doesn’t have to be only organic or boho and not refined,” she says. “It’s really just about sourcing things. I think anything’s possible.” +