



Today, many people are choosing to move back to the urban centers of America. These urbanites cover all age and social groups including many retirees seeking more activity. The migration back to downtown has caused a resurgence in the popularity of downtown lofts and flats.

While lofts have traditionally been known to be old converted warehouses reserved for artists and the eclectic, today they are some of the hottest real estate properties going. Further, with the changing demographics of America, don't expect these unique residences to lose popularity.

So, what is attracting people to want to live in what is essentially a big open room? Perhaps it is style. Or maybe location is driving the choice. To better understand their choice let's look at what a loft really is and what it is becoming.

lofty finds

IN URBAN CENTERS

By Mauro Sanchez





This loft occupies the second and third floors of the most recent commercial building built in Habersham, South Carolina. The balcony overlooks the town center below.

There are two different types of lofts: A hard loft and a soft loft. A hard loft is the traditional residence conformed within some old, historic building that is often full of character and history. A soft loft is what developers are building today to satisfy the increasing demand for loft living. Both hard and soft lofts are characterized by big open spaces, lots of floor-to-ceiling windows, and soaring ceilings. Given their configuration and proximity to urban centers, lofts are a very unique way to live.

Increasingly, builders and developers are using the loft nomenclature as a marketing tool to sell or rent what

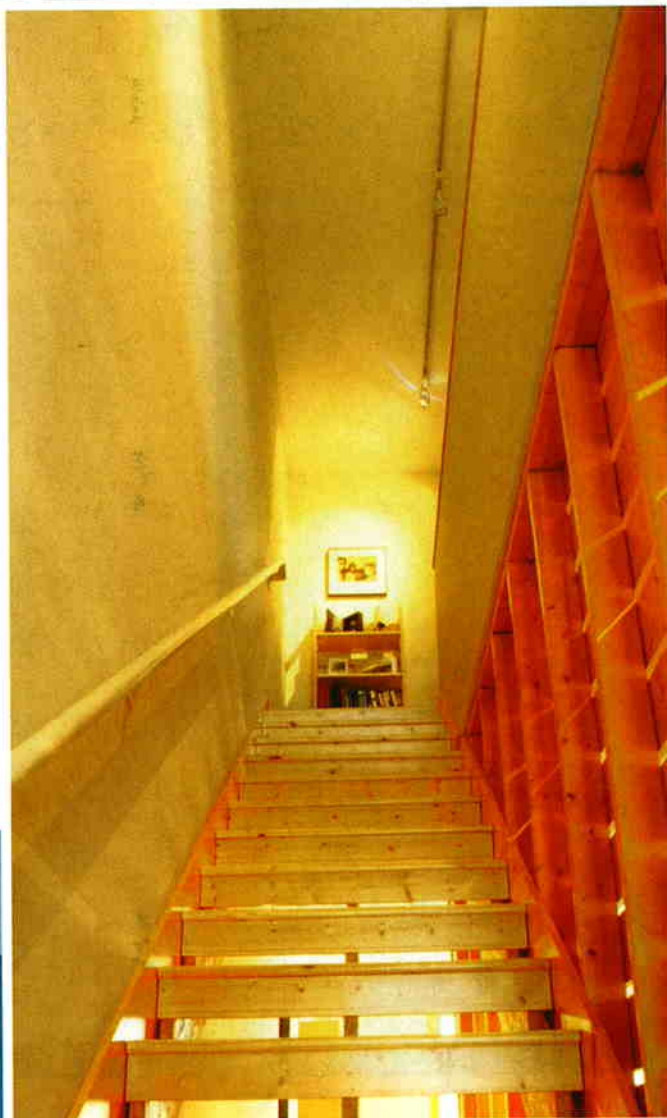
is essentially a townhouse or condo with high ceilings. Regardless, the ploy seems to be working, as any property termed to be a loft or flat seems to be selling or renting at record paces. With these soft lofts, location seems to be the major selling point. They are usually located within close proximity to downtown or shopping districts.

Many loft seekers are looking for a nice place to go to hang out and not have to maintain the pool or the yard. They just lock the door and go to the pub or restaurant down the street. This active yet low-maintenance lifestyle has developed a whole culture associated with loft living. Residents want to

be close to entertainment, food, drinks and sports. And, they don't mind paying for that convenience either. Often lofts are selling or renting for considerably more than residents of similar square footage and quality located in traditional neighborhoods.

Now, to the most important and exciting part of living in a loft. How do you decorate one big room that has to serve as a bedroom, kitchen, dining room, and living room? If you are the artistic, creative type, you become very innovative and design your living space yourself. The rest hire an interior decorator that specializes in lofts. Although many are attracted to the open

lofty finds



space in a loft, most buyers and renters still require traditional walls around their bedroom and bathrooms. If you want to break up the open spaces in the main living area, there is specially designed furniture and unconventional dividers, such as frosted glass and half walls, for this purpose. To assist with decorating these unique properties, some designers are even offering “starter packs” which have a specially chosen combination of contemporary items such as sofas, armchairs, coffee tables, moveable screens, etc.

Finally, there is the live/work unit, which is quickly making a comeback as people realize that living above a busi-



ness, whether yours or someone else's, has its advantages. Imagine walking into the ground floor of a wonderfully designed work space that looks out onto a private garden in the back. Up one flight of stairs and "WOW!" A luxury kitchen is the centerpiece of a double-height entertaining and living room, illuminated by expansive openings in the roof. But that's not all, this spectacular room, framed by glass and brick walls, leads to the third level where you find a couple bedrooms, again taking advantage of an open feeling and setting. Finally, you can follow another set of stairs up to a roof terrace with views across the beloved town or city of your choice. It's no wonder lofts are making a comeback.

