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Lens Crafters

Three renowned Chicago photographers bring their own homes into extraordinary focus. From behind the comfort of the camera, Dave Jordano, Michelle Litvin and Leah Missbach Day take us on a self-curated tour through their photo-worthy—and incredibly intriguing—personal living spaces.

By Lisa Cregan | Photography by Dave Jordano, Michelle Litvin and Leah Missbach Day



THRILLING ME SOFTLY

Three-year-old Lincoln lost amid Mom and Dad's down-strewn bed. Red walls lend intimacy to a space that's actually open to the living room below.



"I know colors can mean fire and energy, and I use them carefully," says Missbach Day.

PRECIOUS MEMENTO

This tiny rocking chair is one of the few childhood mementos Missbach Day salvaged from a 1985 fire in her parents' apartment.



OPEN HOUSE Painted steel stairs lead up to the second floor where plants cascade over balcony railings. A painting by Mel Rosas called "Detroit Underpass" complements the industrial spirit of a Fire Orb hearth.

**OPEN SEATING**

In this rambling, open-plan living area there's room for an indoor hammock for reading and quiet time. Additional seating consists of a pair of hanging wicker swings with custom cushions from Fran's Wicker.



Leah Missbach Day

Four moving photographs of life in rural Africa greet visitors to photographer Leah Missbach Day's sprawling West Loop loft. Missbach Day has always used her camera to document her passions and these days her subject is the World Bicycle Relief charity she co-founded with her husband, cycling entrepreneur FK Day.

Photographers are different than you and me. They see more shadows. Talk to documentary photographer Missbach Day about the rambling loft she shares with her husband and their three-year-old son, Lincoln, and it's the shadows she keeps coming back to. Not

shadows as in shadowy—the gloomy hidden corners of her loft—because frankly, there aren't any in this sunlight-flooded space. She means the tracery of light on surface she can't help noticing everywhere she looks. "We get such great afternoon shadows," Missbach Day says. "The long table and ladder-back chairs make *Alice in Wonderland* kind of shadows."

Living with a three-year-old may explain the Alice allusions. Day began combining this collection of adjacent West Loop lofts even before they were married. Since then the couple has continued patiently acquiring neighboring lofts, knocking down the walls and figuring out what the new space should be afterward. Today it's around 7,000 square feet, encompassing a maze of staircases and catwalks (think M.C. Escher) and a rooftop terrace and patch of lawn that Day actually goes up and mows like some **CONTINUED...**

INDUSTRIAL AGE

Lincoln turns the tables on his photographer mom in this rugged former factory space. Chicago interior designer Hilary Bailes helped choose the rich color palette.

...CONTINUED hipster Ward Cleaver.

Seven years ago, Missbach Day and her husband asked architect Alicia Scrafano for her advice on making sense of the space. Since then she's helped them redo the kitchen and combine two more adjacent lofts into the floorplan. Because the couple throws frequent fundraisers for World Bicycle Relief, which provides sturdy bikes, parts and repair skills to isolated Third World villages, Scrafano left a backup kitchen downstairs for caterers to use. That's also where Lincoln hangs out and where Missbach Day has her office. Notable upstairs features are the open-mesh suspended catwalks that connect the bedrooms and some industrial-strength ceiling fans that are covered to save the family's free-flying parakeet, Cherry Blossom, from doing anything too self-destructive. Hanging plants trail their tendrils everywhere and, together with the couple's African art and

brightly colored paintings, give the place a free-spirited, retro vibe.

Furnishings are mostly monochromatic, because Missbach Day tends to shy away from color. "I have trouble with color photography. I think I feel too respectful of the color of things—I know colors can mean fire and energy and I use them carefully."

One example of her beautiful work in black and white is sandwiched between the sliding panels of the newly installed guest room doors. "They're acrylic so we could have put anything in there," says Missbach Day. "Alicia suggested we do a photo of mine. I was hesitant but then it dawned on me: the photo I took the day we adopted Lincoln. We were all feeling so good and I looked up and saw these beautiful clouds and this bird flying across—the sky looked like we all felt. So I photographed it."

BIG SKY Missbach Day's nephew, Chance, relaxes in the guest room where sliding doors of translucent 3Form panels encase a Missbach Day photo of a perfect sky on a perfect day.



"I looked up and saw those beautiful clouds and this bird flying across—the sky looked how we all felt. So I photographed it."

SNOW ANGEL Lincoln clears snow on the roof-top deck, oblivious to the spectacular skyline view. "He's a working guy!" laughs Missbach Day.



MAKING WAVES A tsunami painting by Richard Bosman over the fireplace is very special.



DARK LIGHT Moooi "Random" lights from Lightology add uncommon drama to a simple stairwell.

SHADOW BOX Missbach Day loves the way her long expanse of west-facing windows throws a wide variety of silhouettes onto floor and walls all day.

