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An eclectic couple gives a West Loop condo new life

BY JESSICA ROYER OCKEN

marriage of styles

What happens when urban girl meets (and falls for) outdoor boy? No, this isn't the set-up of a new TV series; it's the real-life adventure of F.K. Day and Leah Missbach Day. But in this story, all ends happily: they create a marriage, a family, and an eclectic home that showcases their life together.

The story begins in the 1000 West Washington building of Chicago's West Loop. The vintage building, a Nabisco bakery in the late 1800s and a book bindery in the 1950s, was turned into condos in 1996. That's when F.K. Day, a Michigan native and cofounder of SRAM Corporation, the Chicago bicycle-components manufacturer, moved in and combined two units into a bachelor pad. He'd purchased an adjacent unit as well, but had never bothered to connect it with the rest of his place.

When Leah, a photographer, joined him in 2002, the couple began making wedding plans and contemplating turning the pad into their home. They hired Elissa Scrafano, principal of Scrafano Architects, to undertake the transformation, and, when the contractors and craftsmen moved in, the couple fled to Leah's place.

The redo was a complete revamp of the space: Away went the wall separating the third unit, the owner's bedroom became an owner's suite with spacious closet and bathroom, and the kitchen went from basic to big league as the fully-equipped heart of the home. The five bathrooms became three, providing for more open space and a darkroom.

The couple's aesthetics are very different, notes Scrafano. "Leah is very urban. She likes rectilinear straight lines. F.K. is more organic. Half the fun was merging their styles." The successful integration shows up in various elements in the home. The kitchen's curved island plays against the straight angles of cabinets and stainless steel appliances. Urban and organic also interact in the couple's choice of materials. "We wanted to keep the integrity of the materials [originally used in the space]," explains Leah. Shelves, counters, banisters, and a few pieces of furniture made by F.K. and Leah were created with wood reclaimed from old barns or salvaged from beams leftover from the third unit. The remaining kitchen counters are a chic concrete. "We found that to be the least



environmentally gouging material," says Leah.

The original units included upper levels, which are now joined and expanded into a second floor with slate-tile and steel-mesh flooring. Filtered light and multiple plants hanging from railings bring in the outdoors. The upper level includes two offices, a guest bedroom, the owner's suite, and access to the roof, while still leaving the lower-level living areas open a glorious 16 feet to the ceiling.

"You can't change the aesthetic [in a building like this]," says Scrafano. The space has a bold, strong personality—but its inhabitants are even stronger. Newly married, F.K. and Leah moved back to their now roughly 4,000-square-foot home and brought their treasures with them. "Books for F.K. have got to be exposed," says Leah. "They've got to all be out, every single one." Wooden bookshelves run along the brick walls, just below the generous windows, their contents adding assorted colors and revealing the occupants' interest in everything from concept cars to world travel to poetry to novels to—of course—photography and bicycles.

The couple's current project is World Bicycle Relief, a charitable organization they created that takes F.K., and often Leah, all over the world. Miniatures and

antiques from Paris, Africa, Sri Lanka, and Asia dot the home's interior landscape, reminders of adventures past. Furniture from F.K.'s family, Leah's photography, paintings purchased abroad and from artist friends, and rugs from around the world round out the collection. All is appropriately accompanied by pet parakeets twittering in the atrium.

After living for a time in the condo, and with the anticipated arrival of baby Lincoln in June 2006, Leah yearned for a little more unity in the space and brought in interior designer Hilary Bailes, principal of the eponymous Chicago design firm. "It has to stay eclectic, and it wants to be open and warm," explains Leah. "That's a hard combination." But Bailes was up for the task, and they settled on three main goals: unify the space, make the living area more inviting, and improve acoustics and comfort. Once they began, the tasks were not as separate as they seemed.

"It is one large, open interior, and there's a lot going on in there with all of the things they have that they love," notes Bailes. "Books, birds, plants, hammocks. We tried to bring it all together." Color was the first unifying force. Terra cotta red warms the wall of the owner's bedroom, while gray-blue calms the living spaces and

OPPOSITE PAGE Global artifacts, reminders of past adventures, are displayed throughout the space. BELOW Well-designed lighting creates intimate areas, even though the condo is vast. Here, an unusual swing chair lends a twist to more buttoned-up seating.





highlights the art on the walls. These shades are also present in fabrics from couch pillows to floor cushions.

To create a better sense of connection, Bailes separated the home into more intimate spaces. "Even though large and open is very dramatic, it's nice to have smaller spaces within that," she says. Shifts in lighting helped focus attention in particular areas, and an upholstered bench clustered with Leah's beloved pair of swing chairs made a more functional sitting area. Custom rugs are en route from Tibet to further define these spaces and to make the original hardwood floors more inviting for baby playtime and yoga workouts alike.

These adjustments also solved the living room situation. A new sectional couch "takes on a sculptural feel in [the] space," adding interest and openness, which makes the area more inviting, explains Bailes. It's also made of a "bulletproof" gray fabric, Leah says—perfect for Lincoln and other kids who come to call.

Then, finally, they focused on acoustics and comfort. Where F.K. felt one with the outdoors in the open, airy space, Leah felt a bit exposed. The solution? Sheers were placed on the windows and around the open stairs to the owner's suite, and a privacy screen was added to the bathtub window overlooking the lower level. "I needed the cocoon feeling," explains Leah. Blinds and sheers allow you to adapt the space to your needs, says Bailes, "rather than you adapting to the space.... Adding textiles really helps soften things acoustically and emotionally"—just in time to welcome baby.

With the process now nearly complete, Bailes characterizes it as fine tuning. "Leah has a very good sense of style, and they had a strong base," Bailes says. "We just cleaned it up visually. That's what's fun about working with them: I could go in and say I want everything out—all the books, all the plants, it all goes—but they have such a strong sense of what they want that it's not even a discussion." **MH**

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FOR MORE INFORMATION ON RESOURCES FEATURED IN THIS STORY, PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 110.





OPPOSITE PAGE Warm terra cotta tones and a wall of sheers give the owners' bedroom an intimate feeling. THIS PAGE, LEFT Architect Elissa Scrafano revamped the space to create this contemporary kitchen. Counters are made of reclaimed wood and chic concrete. BELOW A garden of houseplants softens the railings and steel mesh flooring of the upper level.

