

Gaggenau new spaces 11

3 mm

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GAGGENAU

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The Art of Contrasts: Brad Friesen's Yaletown loft

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Exciting contrasts
Unplastered brick walls, rough concrete, dark wooden floors – and a stainless steel kitchen with ultramodern Gaggenau appliances. Brad Friesen's loft deliberately creates contrasts.

Downtown Vancouver is renowned for its thicket of slender new high-rises. But nestled within this forest of glass and steel is Yaletown, an enclave of century-old mid-rise building stock that defies the cold semiotics of the modern metropolis. Originally this was a warehouse district lying along the city's False Creek waterway, but over time this six-block cache has evolved into a neighbourhood of stylish restaurants and condominiums converted from the old building stock. It's a true 21st century revival and the new epicentre for young single urbanites like Brad Friesen. "I'm a downtown guy," explains Friesen, "I have everything I need within a two-block radius."

A few years ago, Friesen purchased a two-bedroom condo unit in a particularly well-restored brick warehouse conversion on Mainland Street in the heart of Yaletown. Dubbed the Del Prado, this circa-1900 mid-rise had been converted by the developer into a series of tasteful but rather generic two-bedroom suites. With their copious use of drywall and light-hued built-in cabinetry, most of the units were devised to appeal to just about everybody.

Sophisticated lighting

Because the apartment has windows only on one side, a sophisticated LED lighting system creates different moods throughout.



But here's the rub: Friesen isn't everybody. He's an edgy self-employed entrepreneur with a dark sense of humour. Asked what he does in life, he replies, "I fly helicopters; I drink a lot." He has crisscrossed Morocco on a dirt bike with a camera affixed to his helmet, and he's gleefully proud to show the results on his MacBook. He drives a yellow Porsche Boxster and might fly to Thailand on a week's notice.

In short, Friesen is the kind of guy who inclines away from the safe-and-subtle and towards audacity. So the conventional-looking unit he purchased really didn't fit his personality or lifestyle. Driven partly by sheer curiosity, he pried off some drywall and uncovered an unexpectedly magnificent set of raw concrete walls – which he decided to keep as is, rather than resurface them. He also raised the ceiling and exposed more of the original wall masonry – even in the kitchen. "I wanted the brick to serve as my backsplash," he says. The ceilings were also partly stripped so as to expose the overhead ductwork, which reinforces the industrial personality of the space. Next, he obliterated some of the interior walls to reconfigure the rather conventional two-bedroom layout into a one-bedroom plan with a large kitchen at the centre and the bedroom and living area radiating out from either side.

Friesen enlisted the designer Kelly Reynolds to design the master bathroom, a deluxe backlit oasis highlighted by a shower stall with Expressionist images of tree branches that seem to grow out of the wall surface. With the unit's one and only set of windows set in the streetside wall, much of the apartment is swathed in darkness. Reynolds has strategically provided artificial light throughout the space, beginning with LED strips recessed within the bathroom cabinetry.

Reynolds specified the millwork, finishes and fixtures, working in close partnership with Friesen on major design features. The sliding doors of the bathroom and the toilet are sheathed in custom-treated aluminium that has been distressed in a chemical bath to look rusty, like an ageing factory door. For furnishings, the pair scrutinised the most recent offerings in high-end contemporary lines. The living area is classic Yaletown cool, with a B & B Italia sofa alongside Vancouver furniture designer Brent Combs' gorgeous side table composed of alder



Unusual details

An "open" bar was built into the high-tech kitchen to make it easier to serve beverages.

"I wanted the brick to serve as my backsplash."




**Above all,
be unconventional**
Brad Friesen is an unusual guy, and that's why he wanted his apartment, including the high-tech kitchen, to be something special.

branch segments. “I would literally check out trendir.com every single day,” Friesen recalls. One of his finds is a daredevil’s fireplace: a rectangular steel plinth topped with stones, through which a long, linear open flame rises — at the touch of a button, of course. “Not good for anyone with kids or cats”, he smiles.

The large industrial windows offer a view of another warehouse-turned-condo across the street. Friesen’s window covering unfurls with a touch of his iPod, and the entry access, the fireplace and the heating are also controlled in this way. The technology is part of the essence of the place, and of its owner.

Around the corner, the kitchen reads as a darkly sleek central courtyard for the entire residence. The touch-latch cabinets boast 26 coats of black lacquer, which was wet-sanded between each coat to project a gleaming mirror-like finish. Across from the cabinetry is an organic counterpoint: a matte-gray CaesarStone counter with a burnished walnut plank embedded within. Prominently visible against the dark cabinetry is the complex of Gaggenau cooking appliances: an embedded oven and Combi-steam oven, a fully automatic espresso machine and warming drawers. However, the warming drawers have turned out to be superfluous in Friesen’s life. “That’s where I keep all my letters warm,” he jokes. “They’ve just become junk drawers.” Like the warming drawers, most of the appliances — including the washer, dryer and refrigerator — are all hidden behind monolithic black doors. Even the electrical outlets, from Vancouver designer Omer Arbel’s streamlined Bocci collection, are overtly low-key. “I wanted a lot of technology,” says Friesen, “but I didn’t want to see it.”

Friesen takes most of his meals at nearby restaurants, so some of the appliances serve more as high-tech sculpture than functional objects. But the appliances that serve his beverage needs are highly active workhorses: the Gaggenau Vario wine climate cabinet, packed to the brim, and the fully automatic espresso machine.

The Vancouver designer Robert Ledingham, who served as the consultant for the overall interior of the Del Prado building as well as a few of its custom units, lauds the spirit of buyers like Friesen. “He’s taking the right approach,” notes Ledingham. Many of the conventional plans and materials of the original units were necessitated for safety’s sake: banks don’t like to finance expensive building conversions unless they feel the project is selling mostly tried and true formulaic layouts. “But the more interesting way is to treat it as a New York loft,” says Ledingham. “Tear out a lot of walls, make it your own.” Brad Friesen has certainly achieved that in spades. 

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Rebirth of a warehouse

The century-old brick building is an architectural gem in Vancouver’s trendy False Creek neighbourhood.

