

# Off the wall in



Down with the tyranny of the room: faced with small floor plates and large structural columns, partners Paul Kariouk and Frederic Carrier stripped a condo back to its raw volume and reconfigured the space to suit themselves.

—By Rhys Phillips

Developers invariably believe it is easier to market even very modest-sized condominiums as “two bedrooms” than as “open space living without walls.” Paul Kariouk, an architecture professor at Carleton University who also maintains a design practice, and his partner, Frederic Carrier, an architect with Public Works and Government Services Canada, begged to differ when faced with a carved-up loft apartment at the very heart of downtown Ottawa. Located on the 17<sup>th</sup> floor of the Mondrian, named after the Dutch artist because of the tower’s geometrically patterned curtain wall interspersed with transparent red glass panels, the 850-square-foot corner apartment featured two floor-to-ceiling glazed walls. But while it was marketed as “modern urban living,” a very tight kitchen/dining/living room space was shoehorned between two walled bedrooms with a full bathroom bumping out from the back wall.

The developer’s marketing cliché, says Kariouk during an interview at the unit, actually means imposing on small floor plates, further restricted by large structural columns and intrusive mechanical systems, a spatial logic of segregated spaces at best suitable for larger suburban houses. As this severely prescribes the owner’s choice of furniture and layout, the slogan “ironically suggests that ‘modern urban living’ is really just the equivalent of utter predictability and the suppression of individual choices.”

Kariouk and Carrier commenced by stripping the unit

back to its raw volume. They tore down the bedroom walls, dismantled the intruding bathroom box, and removed all the conventional closets. The idea was to reconfigure the space through, in Kariouk’s words, “the dynamic and poetic use of *poché*, the conventional ‘service space’ of any home including mechanical conduits” and the minimization of circulation space. Across the back width of the unit they also introduced a seven-inch-high platform that permitted the flexibility to alter water pipes and drains.

A unifying white porcelain tile floor, extended out onto the balcony to visually connect inside and out, adds “reflective properties that contribute to an entirely luminous interior.” Likewise, J.P. Jelle’s handcrafted, floor-to-ceiling cabinetry that skirts the inner perimeter, as well as a freestanding closet “screen” for the sleeping area, are glossy-white with minimalist detailing. In the substantial entry hall, these cabinets taper inward creating a gently expanding space; it’s rather whimsically marked with a niche containing a low-splash urinal bowl, equipped with a Kohler spout, that their large Leonburger, Charlemagne, can activate to get a drink on his own.

The kitchen for Kariouk constitutes the heart of a home. Thus, a 15-foot-long island topped in light-grey quartz and complete with cooking appliances and a sink, is cantilevered along the edge of the platform bridge overlooking the loft’s public spaces. Modest tapering on the island’s suspended side

adds enough extra space to accommodate a dining-table area in the unit’s glazed southeast corner, a sunlit space that provides the best view over the city.

To ensure both a generous kitchen and a doubling of cabinet space, Kariouk and Carrier introduced a radical rethinking of how a bathroom functions. The typical bathroom, Kariouk explains, requires at least some wasteful circulation space. But, if you remove the shower/tub, an airplane-like sink and toilet washroom fit neatly into the width of the cabinets stretched across the back of the apartment.

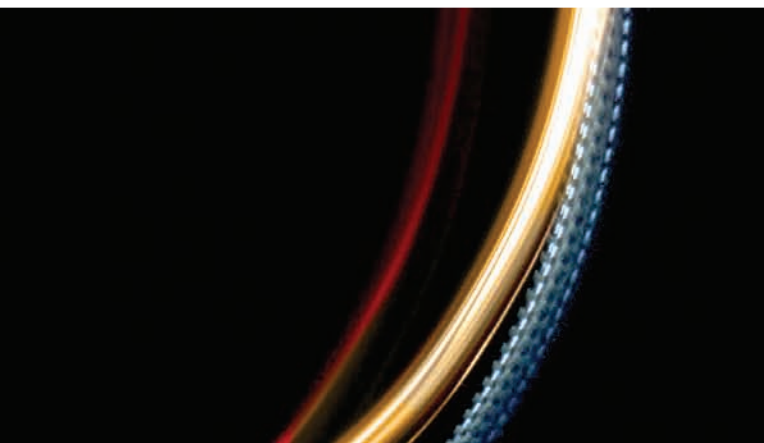
Reinstating the now-missing shower, as well as dealing with the awkwardness of two existing concrete columns and two pre-determined mechanical towers, required a creative solution. While one of the mechanical towers is hidden within the bedroom wall screen, the second and “most egregious central mechanical unit” (along with one of the building’s structural columns) is enveloped within a floor-to-ceiling elliptical form. As the space separating the two given elements then serves as a closet, the result is “utmost spatial efficiency.” This element also serves to separate the living room from the dining area. A slightly more elongated ellipse surrounds the other structural column but also serves both as a second screen separating the sleeping area from the main public space and as a clothes closet. Both ellipses are constructed of silk fabric stretched on steel frames, thus





**Right and below** Opposing views of the loft's public spaces. Floor-to-ceiling elliptical forms – constructed of silk fabric stretched on frames – artfully hide structural columns. A unifying white porcelain tile floor, extended out onto the balcony to visually connect inside and out, adds "reflective properties that contribute to an entirely luminous interior." The kitchen constitutes the heart of a home; a 15-foot-long island, topped in light-grey quartz, is cantilevered along the edge of the platform bridge overlooking the public spaces.

**Bottom** A view at dusk highlights the "shower with a view," visible from almost anywhere in the condo. It too is a freestanding ellipse but of frameless curved glass, although also covered by a removal outer silk skin.





**Above** J.P. Jelle's handcrafted, floor-to-ceiling cabinetry skirts the condo's inner perimeter. In the substantial entry hall, these cabinets taper inward creating a gently expanding space; it's rather whimsically marked with a niche containing a low-splash urinal bowl, equipped with a Kohler spout, that the designers' large Leonburger, Charlemagne, can activate to get a drink on his own. **Left** An airplane-like sink and toilet washroom fit neatly into the width of the cabinets stretched across the back of the condo.

ensuring lightness and semi-translucence.

But what of that elusive shower? It too is a freestanding ellipse but of frameless curved glass, although also covered by a removal outer silk skin. Visible from almost anywhere in the apartment, the roomy shower stands prominently on the bridge. Says Kariouk, "How many apartments can boast a shower with a 270-degree view over the city?" As the thin silk is hardly opaque, a recessed ceiling track allows a bronze coloured curtain, tucked away within the cabinetry, to be drawn around the shower for privacy while a similar system can also fully close off the bedroom. All of these quirky forms, Kariouk adds, "are calibrated to inflect the movement throughout the entire apartment with nuanced delineations of a sleeping area, a dining area and a living area."

Unlike most condo balconies that soon morph into storage areas, Kariouk and Carrier wanted theirs to be a functioning living space. To augment the white tiles, fibre-optic acrylic rods of varied lengths were placed along the balustrade. Lit from below and flexible enough to sway in the wind, the rods act as a "garden" wall of willow reeds. It is a conceit that gives texture, definition and even sound to the balcony's perimeter while, more functionally, stops the dog from putting its paws up on the rail.

The Redeveloper Apartment, as its designers call it, succeeds in taking the irony out of the marketing phrase "modern urban living" by reinstating fluidity, quirkiness and a sense of the unexpected, some of the hallmarks of residing downtown. 