



WHEN PAUL KARIOUK MOVED FROM NEW YORK CITY TO OTTAWA, HE BROUGHT HIS BIG-CITY THINKING WITH HIM. KARIOUK TRANSFORMED A 1930s-ERA APARTMENT INTO A SLEEK CONTEMPORARY LOFT WORTHY OF THE MOST DISCERNING URBANITE

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MANHATTAN TRANSFER

OPPOSITE PAGE

Paul Kariouk knocked out walls and stripped back the ceiling to reveal a long, lean open space. The heart of the renovation is the kitchen, seen here from the living area. A concrete-topped counter, cast in place, is the central focus.

FAR RIGHT

The utility area at the entrance to the loft features a shower and drainable floor, useful for washing off muddy items, such as winter boots and pets.

For a national capital, Ottawa's city core has few urban thoroughfares. If there is an exception, it is Metcalfe Street, a major business and residential avenue running between two of the city's best known neo-Gothic landmarks, Canada's Parliament Buildings and its Museum of Nature. Behind mature trees repose an eclectic mix of grand heritage mansions, cool International Style, residential slabs and 1930s mid-rise blocks

Of the last, the Mayfair has long been one of the city's most sought after apartment addresses. The seven-storey H-plan block sitting tight to the street suggests an uptown New York walk-up with hints of Depression-era art deco influences. It was the only building New York-raised architect Paul Kariouk would even consider moving into, when, in 2000, he relocated to Ottawa to take a post at Carleton University's School of Architecture. Not only was it familiar ground, but the Mayfair's "good bones" would allow Kariouk to slip a minimalist thong under its reserved, even dowdy, dress.





Liberated from the original eight small rooms left over when the previous owner had joined two one-bedroom apartments, the mainly open 111-square-metre loft is now a lively, light-filled live/work space. It illustrates Kariouk's very decided views on privacy, functionality and flexibility. These ideas, and the back-and-forth design process used to realize them, provide clues not only to Kariouk's cosmopolitan upbringing, but also to why he has chosen to settle permanently in Ottawa's tamer cultural environment.

Born to Parisian [[emigres]] with a taste for the arts and architecture, Kariouk spent considerable time with his grandmother, a costume designer for the New York City Ballet. "She was always creating these absolutely whimsical, incredible things as well as inventing projects for me that involved making things in a very much hands-on way."

After graduating from the University of Virginia, he returned to work primarily with small New York residential design firms where "there was

always some component in the project that we had to fabricate ourselves. This remains central to my work." Kariouk graduated from Columbia in 1995 with a masters in architecture design. His desire to teach at Carleton was thwarted by immigration laws, but changes in 2000 cleared the way.

"Carleton was my number one choice because of the way theory is sewn in with making," says Kariouk. "They have fantastic shops and there is this idea that architecture students need to make things, that they have to think through their hands. This was consistent both with my approach to practise and my background of always making things."

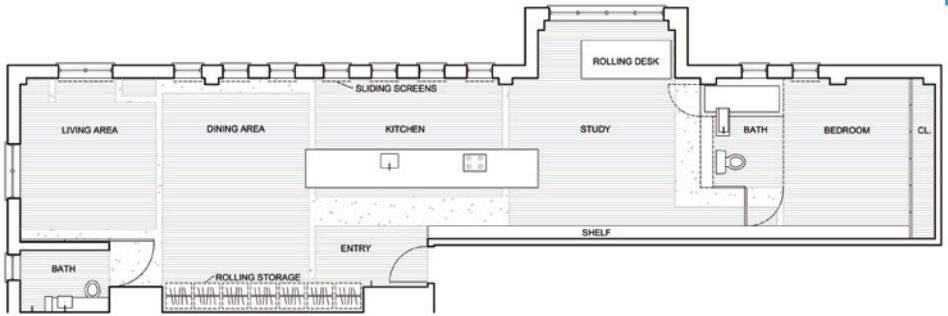
Kariouk first lived in the unaltered space to understand how it received light. "It is an apartment with 18 windows, largely facing northwest. Most of the direct light enters at the short west end of this long narrow space, so you have to be able to tease the light into the far end." The basic open layout came quickly, as did the long, totemic cast-in-place concrete counter stretching down the apartment's spine.

With the walls pulled out, the grid of ruts left in the hardwood floor was leveled with concrete to preserve the old apartment's archaeology. The ceiling, however, was ripped off to expose the original steel web joists, concrete beams and rust-coloured metal lath supporting a 13 centimetre-thick, coarse concrete deck. "You can see how the lath and concrete sags, giving the slab a pillowed look. Instead of cold concrete, it almost looks like a warm, quilted fabric hung above the joists."

His experience with the serendipitous oddity of the ceiling's soft/hard contradiction, along with his hands-on approach to designing, building and fine-tuning, using full-scale prototypes, is manifested in the apartment's 10 marvellous sliding glass screens. "I wanted to use glass to create luminosity, but at the same time glass is cold in an already cold, grey climate." So he laminated linen fabric to the back of the panels, which slide across the windows on barn door

ABOVE

The bathroom is a glass box separating the open study/kitchen/dining areas (seen in the background) from the bedroom. It's plumbing and side walls are backed with red silk, which allows shadows of bodies to be seen from the outside; the front wall can be screened off with blinds. The custom-made concrete sink (below right) is designed to allow water to flow from the sink into the tub in one seamless movement.



tracks. "Suddenly glass that is cold and hard grains warmth and texture in this strange juxtaposition of hard, rigid, cold and transparent with warm, textured, fluid and opaque."

These window screens provide some privacy, but from across the courtyard, shadowy traces of activity remain visible. And this suits Kariouk's critique of North America's obsessive concern with privacy - at least outside New York. "In New York, I knew all of my neighbours across the street for five floors up and down. And we all knew each other although we never met. You knew who they were, you knew their habits, who they are going out with, when they broke up, everything about everybody's life. And nobody cared."

In European or Asian homes, he maintains, life's functions are allowed to overlap, a natural condition discouraged by the concept of space that demands a closed room for every function. In his apartment, the desk slides into the next

BOTTOM LEFT

One of Kariouk's freestanding storage towers is positioned within the dining area. The towers can serve as partitions in the open space; when lit internally they glow, creating a laternlike effect.

ABOVE RIGHT

Kariouk's floor-to-ceiling screens, backed in linen, add texture to the living area. Set on tracks, they roll aside in the daytime to allow natural light into space.



space to extend the kitchen counter, giving the worktop a dual function: sometimes it is a kitchen counter, sometimes a desk on which to build architectural models.

The bedroom and two bathrooms are more private, but only by a degree. The main bathroom is a glass box separating the sleeping area from the rest of the loft. Wooden blinds shade one of the transparent walls and the other three are laminated with red silk, which allows a visible trace of the body when the shower is in use. "We are so insistent on privacy, but in certain situations what gets labeled as private could actually be reclassified as erotic. Can not the architecture of the home be about joy, or desire or eroticism?" he asks rhetorically.

Instead of fixing closets, he created rolling towers made of linen-backed glass that can be used to reconfigure the space: "If I need privacy for a guest, I rearrange the cabinets to form a wall." The space is best, he argues, when the towers are moved from their wall ports to form momentary enclaves to serve a need. Lit from inside, the semitransparent cupboards become lanterns at night.

And then there is the shower in the entrance hall. "I like the surreal juxtaposition of a utility in a formal entrance. It is mostly pure utility, a nifty feature to wash off muddy shoes or hose down the dog" says Kariouk. "But," he adds with just the trace of a smile, "it is also a great, light-filled place to take a shower." **A**