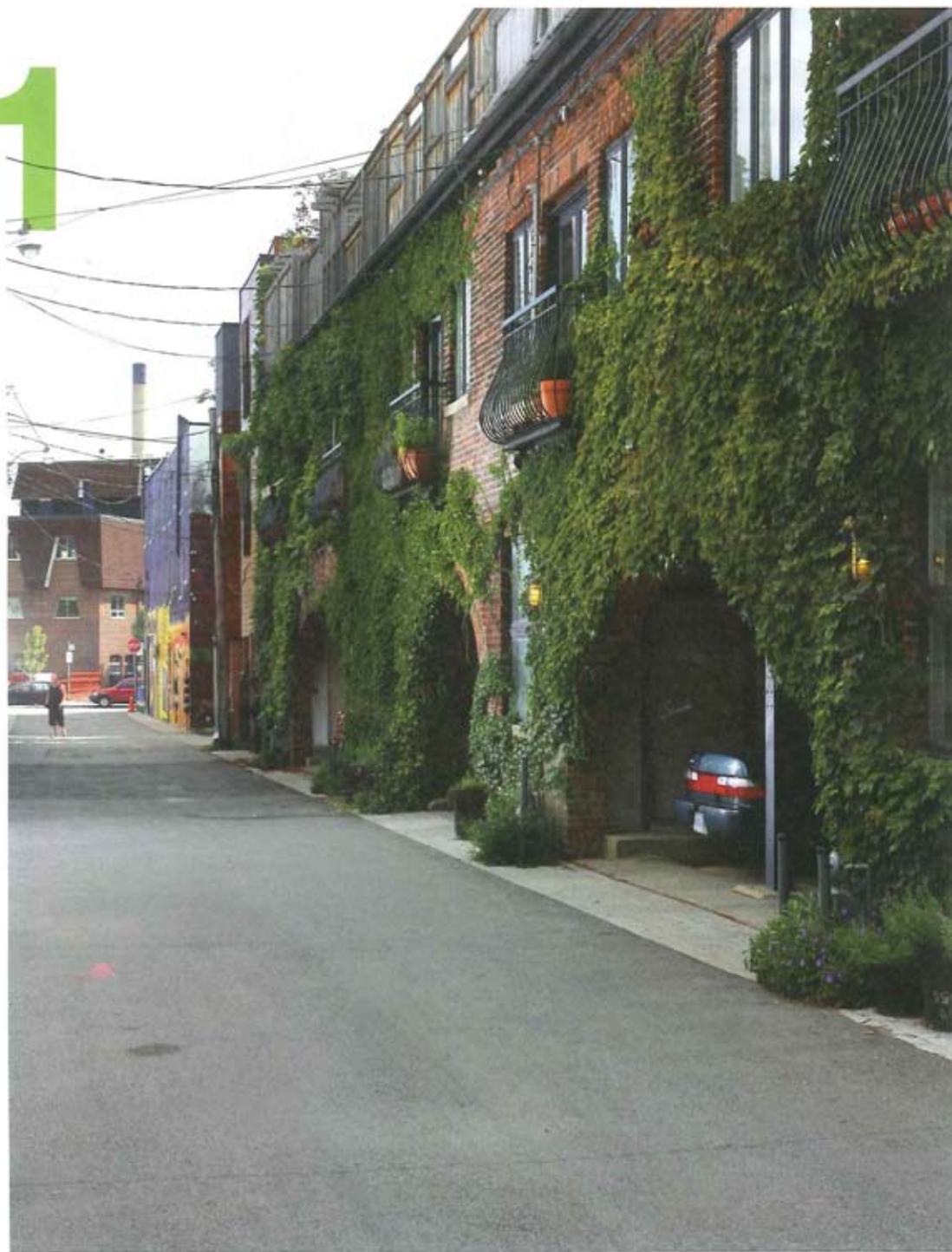


# 1



# Down the lane

## A cherished warehouse gets a new space lift

By Alex Bozikovic

Photography by Lorne Bridgman  
and Ben Rahn/A-Frame

Laneway housing is still a rarity in Toronto, a city that seems to prefer the tidiness of grids to innovative living options. But one such project, by local firm Levitt Goodman Architects, is an exception to the rule. In 1987, Janna Levitt and Dean Goodman bought an old rug cleaning factory on Croft Street, near College and Bathurst, and turned the red brick building into five side-by-side lofts. "This was back when people thought you were crazy for living in a warehouse," says Levitt with a laugh. The building has since become a hub for a community of creative types, and it has taken a place in local architectural history as a stellar example of infill housing and an inspiration for other firms (and clients).

A few years ago, the architects were invited back to give one of the units an interior update, turning the 180-square-metre loft into a live-work space, with an office and master bedroom on the main floor and living spaces above. The first floor got a finely detailed interior

**Opposite** Levitt Goodman Architects originally renovated the old factory back in 1987. They were invited back to update one of the units.

**Below** A lime green glass tile backsplash was added to the kitchen. Custom cabinets are made of veneer and lacquered MDF. The countertop is Blanco Paloma composite quartz and the flooring is solid maple.





of rosewood, slate and glass, and to keep the workspace separate, the architects came up with an effective way to hive off the office, with its inevitable clutter: a pivoting door that functions as a display case and rotates to conceal the office completely.

Renovating the second level was the next phase. Bill Sharpe, the advertising CEO who owns the unit, gave up his uptown house and backyard to head downtown, seeking a more urban experience and "as much minimalism as I could get out of the space," he says.

The upstairs renovation left the basic floor plan intact, with the kitchen and living area on the second level and a lounge area, garden and deck on the third. Levitt still admired the original unit's spatial qualities, a mix of tall, airy volumes and smaller, more intimate ones. The reno's grand gesture is a new staircase that reaches to the top floor – a sleek construction of white-painted steel beams, walnut treads and rosewood rails. Its open risers let light penetrate right through to the galley kitchen, which the architects reconceived from scratch.



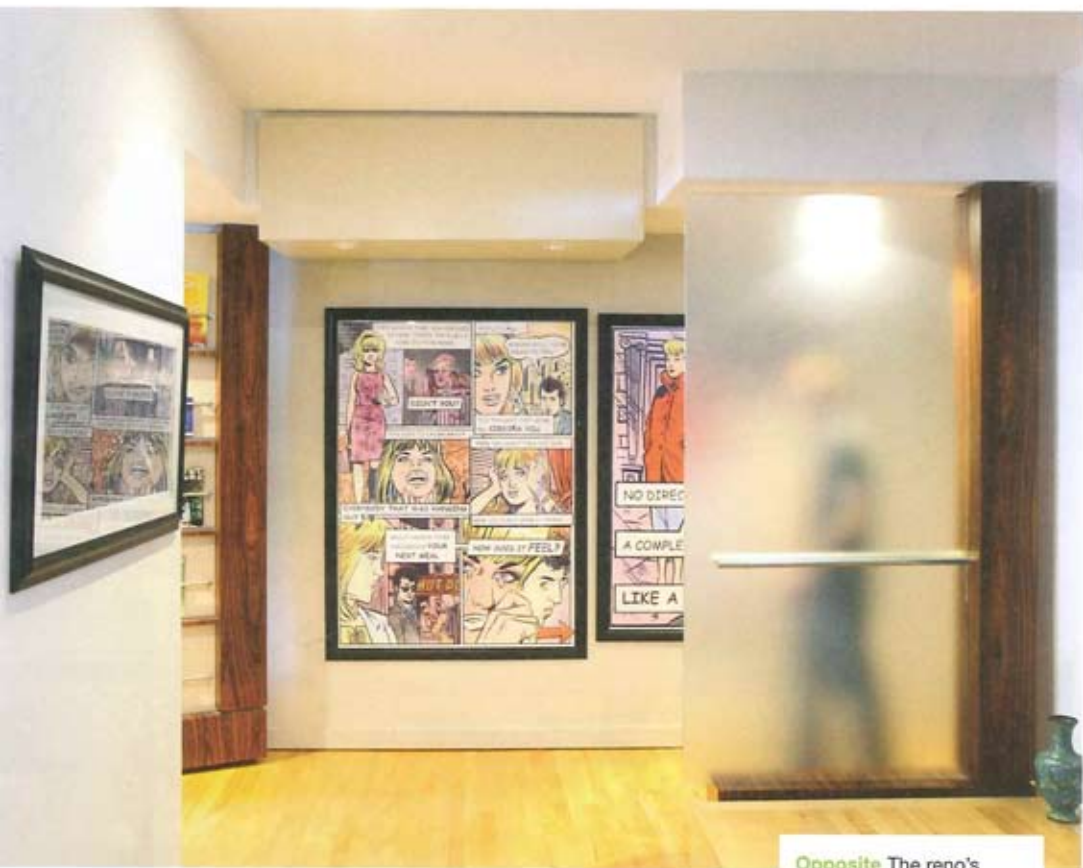
**Above left** The stairways are a major focal point within the three-level space. The red glasses drawing is by Leonard Cohen.

**Above** Starck 3 wash basin and Origami tub by BainUltra. The tub is surrounded by Keystone brickwork by Daltile and the floor is Grigio porcelain from Cercan Tile Inc.

**Right** A den on the second level doubles as a guest bedroom with a Murphy bed behind the red wall.







**Opposite** The reno's grand gesture is a new staircase made of steel beams, walnut treads and rosewood rails.

**Above** Works by Roy Lichtenstein hang on the walls that lead to an office space on the main floor. The flooring is solid maple with East Indian redwood veneer used for trim.

On the main wall of the kitchen, which reaches more than six metres in height, the existing cabinets looked inadequate. Levitt, along with project architect Kris Payne, came up with something more sculptural: a tic-tac-toe arrangement of floating rosewood shelves and white lacquer MDF cabinets – a design Levitt describes as a combination of horizontal boundaries and infill boxes. The firm also put its stamp on the space with a glass tile backsplash in lime green, a shade that's becoming their trademark and features prominently in Levitt and Goodman's own house.

Sharpe admits he was uncertain about that green, but he's grown to love it. He speaks with confidence about the material and spatial choices in the project, but the best elements, he says, are the most basic: the plan and the intimately urban setting, which have brought him together with a "strange collection of people" as new neighbours. Sharpe compares his new address to Amsterdam, with its narrow streets and human scale. "Here, you walk outside and you're right in the lane. You get to know everyone very quickly. Remember," he adds, "I was coming from north Toronto. I think that larger-scale housing sort of keeps people apart. It's very different here."