

Belmont Freeman Architects

In developing a work/live loft in a renovated commercial building on lower Broadway, architect Belmont Freeman confronted the standard challenge attendant to such multi-use projects: adequate differentiation of living and working zones. He was blessed, however, with an uncommon advantage: the client, an artist and founder of a not-for-profit organization providing arts education to underprivileged children, owned two consecutive 1,500-square-foot floors, each perfectly sized to fulfill the domestic and professional aspects of



Lower Manhattan Loft, 1997

the program. Freeman's task thus became one of balancing desires for segregation and connection between the two floors. Working with associates Alane Truitt and Sangho Park, Freeman developed an elegant yet straightforward environment that nods to the late-1990s vogue for minimalist design without evincing the obsessive reductionism and excessive refinement characteristic of similar efforts.

Freeman's restraint is evident in the few architectural gestures that satisfy the program. On the lower working level, sliding partitions of gypsum board and translucent glass provide the requisite flexibility for spatial rearrangement. Here, as above, partitions were held away from the perimeter to maintain open sight lines to views of City Hall and the Brooklyn Bridge. The concrete floor that grounds the studio level gives way to warmer maple flooring on the living level above, where concrete was reserved for kitchen and bath areas. Partitions and open passageways on the upper floor were kept to a height of seven feet, providing an intimacy of scale close to the height of the standing body. Lighting further emphasizes the distinction between the floors, with standard track fixtures and pendant lamps serving the work level and more indirect lighting and concealed fixtures for domestic areas.

Although the abundant space offered ample opportunity to introduce a more conventional stair connecting the two floors, Freeman opted for a steel ship's ladder pitched at a steep seventy-five-degree angle. In the words of the client: "I didn't want to carve a path of desire between my studio and home. I wanted the passage to be a deliberate and transitional act."









