

Glass House

A CAPITOL HILL COUPLE EMBRACES LIFE IN THE FISHBOWL BY ALI BASYE

PHOTOGRAPHY LARA SWIMMER

STYLIST MICHELLE CRISTALLI



“I like being high enough up,
that I live above the treetops,”

Windows are the aesthetic of the exterior, says architect Kevin Tabari of Capitol Hill's Agnes Lofts. Each unit comes with 15-foot-plus floor-to-ceiling windows. Below right: The shorter scale of buildings in south Capitol Hill allows 360-degree views from the Agnes' roof deck.

TOUR THIS HOME

The AIA Seattle // NW Home Open House of the Month Sunday, July 20, Noon-3 p.m. See page 55 for details

says Andi Stevenson, gesturing down from her living room window to the row of sparse maple trees lining Pike Street on Capitol Hill. Stevenson, 34, and her girlfriend, Minan Ahn, 31, moved into their 900-square-foot fourth-floor unit in the Agnes Lofts last October with their two cats, Pepe and Vorgy, and dog, Mugsy. Along with an altitude change from their previous address at the north end of Broadway, comes an influx of light and neighborhood life. ■ “Windows are the eyes of the building, and define how open and friendly and connected a building is to the rest of the neighborhood,” explains the lofts' developer, and the couple's new landlord, Liz Dunn of Dunn & Hobbes. “So I put a lot of effort into making sure the windows are really generous and well received. You can live happily in a really small space if it has a big window.” ■ Inside, the fishbowl aspect of the windows is more subtle. Each unit is deeper rather than wide, allowing for a sizable area of living space that lies out of sight from the pavement below. The sleeping loft is stylishly shielded behind obscured polycarbonate panels, allowing for both light and privacy. The expanse of the windows captures a great deal of light from any direction, throwing sunshine much further back into each unit than one would imagine. ■ Stevenson demonstrates the fire-retardant, polyester-blend curtains with which each unit comes equipped: a sheer, tangerine-colored set of panels allowing filtered views, and soft, heavy, gray-colored drapes blocking out all visibility from the outside. “I didn't want to be too exposed,” she says, “and we found that we can't really be seen from the street at all.”



Clockwise from right: The Agnes Lofts team (left to right): developer Liz Dunn (not shown, Dunn's owner's rep, Eric Hopp); Weinstein A|U project architect Kevin Tabari and collaborating partner Ed Weinstein, tenants Minan Ahn and Andi Stevenson and Weinstein principal-in-charge Leslie Bain. The Ikea-outfitted kitchen and dining space is compressed under the upstairs loft. Ahn and Stevenson's top floor, center unit location, rather than on a lower corner, protects them from most noise and looky-loos from street below. Other privacy measures: sheer curtains to let filtered sunshine in and heavy curtains to completely block visibility into the apartment and polycarbonate panels that hug the light-and-lovely loft bedroom.



In

a city that has seen its fair share of quick-and-cheap development, the crop of new residential buildings on Capitol Hill has been watched with a mixture of hope and wariness. Hope, because much of the gritty but beloved neighborhood that conveniently saddles downtown has been remarkably underutilized, and wariness because the area's diverse residents—a melting pot of gays, punks, professionals, free spirits and students—resent the often generic and expensive condominiums

that threaten to create another Belltown: jacked-up rental rates, increased noise and crime spikes. ■ That's why last autumn's introduction of Agnes Lofts, a four-story mixed-use steel-and-glass cube on the corner of 12th Avenue and East Pike Street, has been so refreshing. The attractive, modern building houses the Balagan Theatre, the Boom Noodle restaurant and three floors of 24 individual rental lofts. The entire building flaunts 15-foot-plus floor-to-ceiling windows, a voyeuristic curiosity that at any given time causes awe-struck pedestrians to stop in their tracks in order to seek a glimpse of what sort of denizens would

live so blatantly on display. In contrast to the imposing walls of cheap-looking siding often seen on quick-built condominiums, the Agnes Lofts rise gracefully from the corner, the pairing of transparency and brawn creating a handsome counterpart to the big-boned vintage buildings that it faces. ■ "More than anything else, the idea that people in the area—non-architects—have walked by and said that this building is an exception to the other developments they've been leery of in the neighborhood, is incredibly validating to hear," says project architect Kevin Tabari of Weinstein A|U Architects + Urban Designers. "I think we



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AIA SEATTLE // NW HOME

OPEN HOUSE

Edition 4 :: Number 20

Architectural Firm :: Weinstein A|U

Architects + Urban Designers, LLC

Cost :: \$6.1 million (for entire building)

Tour it :: Sunday, July 20

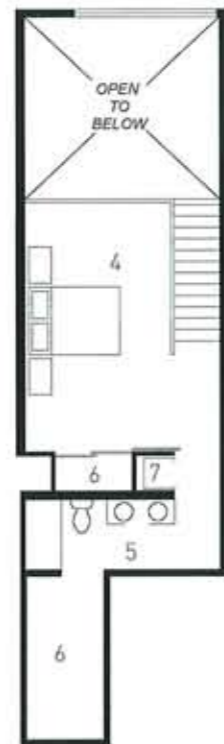
(see details on right)



AIA Seattle NORTHWEST HOME



Loft Level



Living Level



Legend

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------|
| 1. living room | 5. bathroom |
| 2. dining/kitchen | 6. closet |
| 3. powder room | 7. laundry |
| 4. sleeping loft | |

achieved a spatial and aesthetic expression that reflects the more beloved buildings in the neighborhood. It's great if the residents in this area agree with that." ■ "Density gets a bad name because when buildings go up people lose something they value," says Dunn, a longtime Capitol Hill resident who lives in the Agnes Lofts and is also behind the intriguing 1310 Lofts, built a few blocks south on Union Street. "I pay a lot of attention to appropriate scale. New buildings should fit in like missing teeth." ■ This southeastern lip of Capitol Hill between East Pine and East Union streets and 10th and 12th avenues is potentially the hottest up-and-coming neighborhood in town. Traditionally an industrial area of auto-body and repair shops and the occasional grunge bar, the once-quiet streets now teem with the young and beautiful, hot new restaurants and chic boutiques. The industrial look to Agnes Lofts nods to the neighborhood's blue-collar roots while complementing its forward-thinking present. ■ The durable aluminum window walls that are a big part of the building design are not inexpensive, so Tabari was required to be economical in other areas. Bar grading outside a single panel of sliding glass doors creates a protective railing and was recycled from a previous project on which Tabari worked. Airy, open

kitchens and dining areas are compressed under the upstairs lofts and outfitted in Ikea cabinetry, as are bathrooms. The lofts are created with heavy timber construction, an exception to the city code requiring all wood to be covered with drywall because of its equivalent fire-resistant properties, and interior doors are made of barn-door hardware. Big Douglas fir planks strung by channel steel stringers create open-rise stairways to the upstairs. The abundance of wood materials, including maple floors, imparts warmth to the modern, cube-like spaces, and exposed beams give volume and height to the room. ■ The design is purposefully spare, says Tabari. "We tried to create a pure space that would be predominately dominated by the windows and give the occupant the ability to personalize it." ■ Loft living isn't inexpensive; where rent in the neighborhood averages \$1,044 for a one-bedroom, tenants pay an average of \$1,800 a month to live in the Agnes Lofts. For Ahn and Stevenson (who as the apartment and commercial property manager for Agnes Lofts and Dunn & Hobbes, gets a break on rent), the happening urban lifestyle makes it worth it. ■ "It's great being in the middle of everything," says Ahn, a lead bartender at Brasa downtown, "and we love living where all the restaurants are." ♦

Open House Tour

Our ongoing partnership with the **American Institute of Architects Seattle Chapter** (AIA Seattle) continues our commitment to bring the experience of Puget Sound-area residential design to our readers. Each issue, we showcase an architect-designed home, selected by AIA Seattle and *NWH*, that will be open to the public for a Sunday-afternoon viewing. We invite you to tour this issue's featured home, designed by Ed Weinstein, Lesley Bain and Kevin Tabari of Weinstein A|U Architects + Urban Designers, located at **1433 12th Ave., Unit 405, on Capitol Hill, on Sunday, July 20, between noon and 3 p.m.** For more information on the tour and the Open House program, please visit nwhomag.com or aiaseattle.org; 206.448.4938.

 FOR RESOURCES, SEE FIND IT, PAGE 59



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