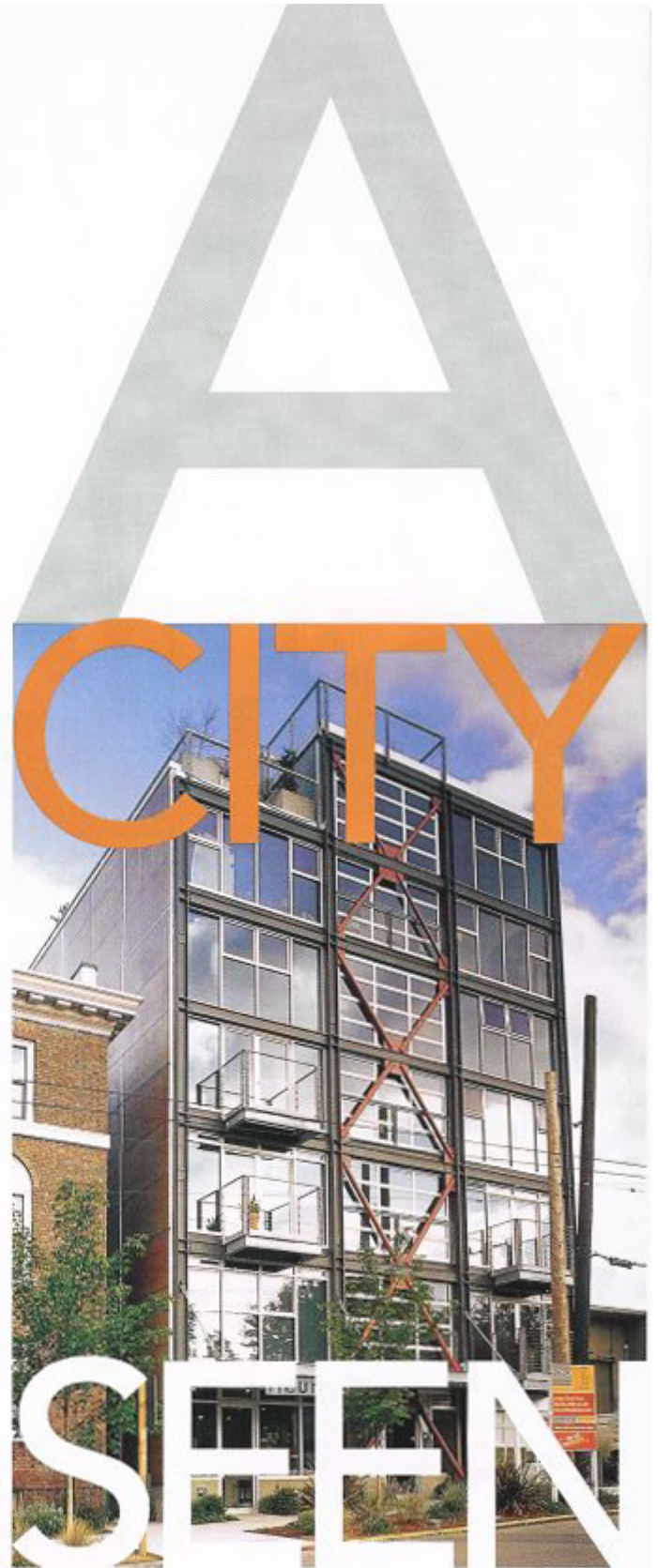


Behind the glass facade of her penthouse, Liz Dunn arranged a leather daybed by Russell Baker, a David Weeks slingback chair and a lamp by Chris Lehecke in front of a painting by Gary Curtis. As part of her effort to contribute to the street life of the neighborhood, Dunn convinced an innovative florist to move into ground-floor retail space.





This Seattle building was designed as an invitation to enjoy the energy of big-city living, not as an escape.

As a developer, Dunn avoids oversize, "neighborhood-busting" buildings. Inside, she prefers human-scale living areas, which she created here from the undivided space with carefully chosen pieces of modern furniture, including a Sarah Richey dining table and Philippe Starck chairs. With the garage door open, the whole apartment becomes an urban terrace.



A

round Seattle, real estate developer Liz Dunn is known as a builder with a difference. Not only is she innovative, but she's a social activist—and she loves living in the city, as this Capitol Hill apartment building, a collaboration with architect David Miller, attests. In fact, she liked it so much that when it was finished she moved into the 1,600-square-foot top-floor unit with partner Bruno Lambert, a Brussels-born race-car driver, and Hobbes, her 12-year-old black Lab.

From their loft, Dunn and Lambert had stunning views of downtown Seattle, with Puget Sound and Mount Rainier in the distance. Often, she says, the sky would glow from 6 A.M. to 10 P.M. But Dunn was interested in the foreground of her neighborhood as well as the background panorama: The building is located in the funky Pike-Pine corridor, which Dunn describes as an “urban village, authentic and electric, with tattoo parlors, vintage-furniture stores, independent coffeehouses and alternative art spaces.”

It was to bring that neighborhood into the apartment that Miller—of Seattle's award-winning Miller/Hull Partnership—gave the unit an industrial garage door instead of a front wall. “Push a button,” he says, “and you've turned the entire condo into a porch.” In fact, every one of the building's eight units has a roll-up front. Miller designed the building for Dunn, who became a real estate developer in the 1990s, in part to help fight sprawl. In that battle, she notes, land preservation and growth management are the driving stick. “I'm trying to provide the carrot,” she suggests, “urban buildings that people want to live in and that neighbors want to look at.”

That's where Miller came in. Most small apartment buildings in Seattle, he says, are wood-frame structures perched on blocky, concrete garages. The garages (both because they're ugly and because they let residents drive right into their buildings) do nothing to enhance street life. Inside these condos, lumber dimensions limit the width of rooms and window openings.

Dunn's project changed all that. Instead of wood, Miller used steel beams and girders ordered off-the-shelf as a “kit of parts.” The entire frame, he says, took three weeks to erect. The cross-bracing, seismic reinforcements required in Seattle, is painted brick red, which Dunn says is a “gesture of connection to the old building next door.” Inside, Dunn and Miller strove for maximum openness, which meant leaving the corrugated-metal ceiling pan exposed. “With this kind of construction,” the architect says, “you don't get to hide your mistakes—so you can't make any.”

Within the units, only the bathrooms are enclosed. That presented the challenge of breaking the rest of the large living spaces into manageable zones. To do that, Dunn served as her own interior designer. She used sisal, cowhide and shag on the concrete floor to give dining, lounging, working and sleeping areas individual identities. In each zone, she grouped furniture around at least one tall piece. “Not so tall that it breaks the sight lines and makes the space seem cluttered,” she says, “but you need some height for variety's sake and to give each area a focal point.” Her goal: to create rooms with design, not walls.

PRODUCED BY DORETTA SPERDUTO AND LINDA HUMPHREY.
PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL JENSEN. WRITTEN BY FRED A. BERNSTEIN.



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Dunn chose all of the furnishings for the loft. "My goal," she says, "was just to make sure the architecture wasn't lost." One way to do that was to keep furniture away from the walls. But that meant finding sculptural pieces that look good from every angle. "That way," she says, "when you change your mind, you can rearrange them any way you want."

The bed was a challenge—many headboards aren't meant to be seen from behind. But with a wall around the bed and nightstand, the space would have seemed cramped. What Dunn discovered, she says, is that in an undivided space, "each zone borrows space visually from the others, so you can actually have more zones than you would if you had walls."

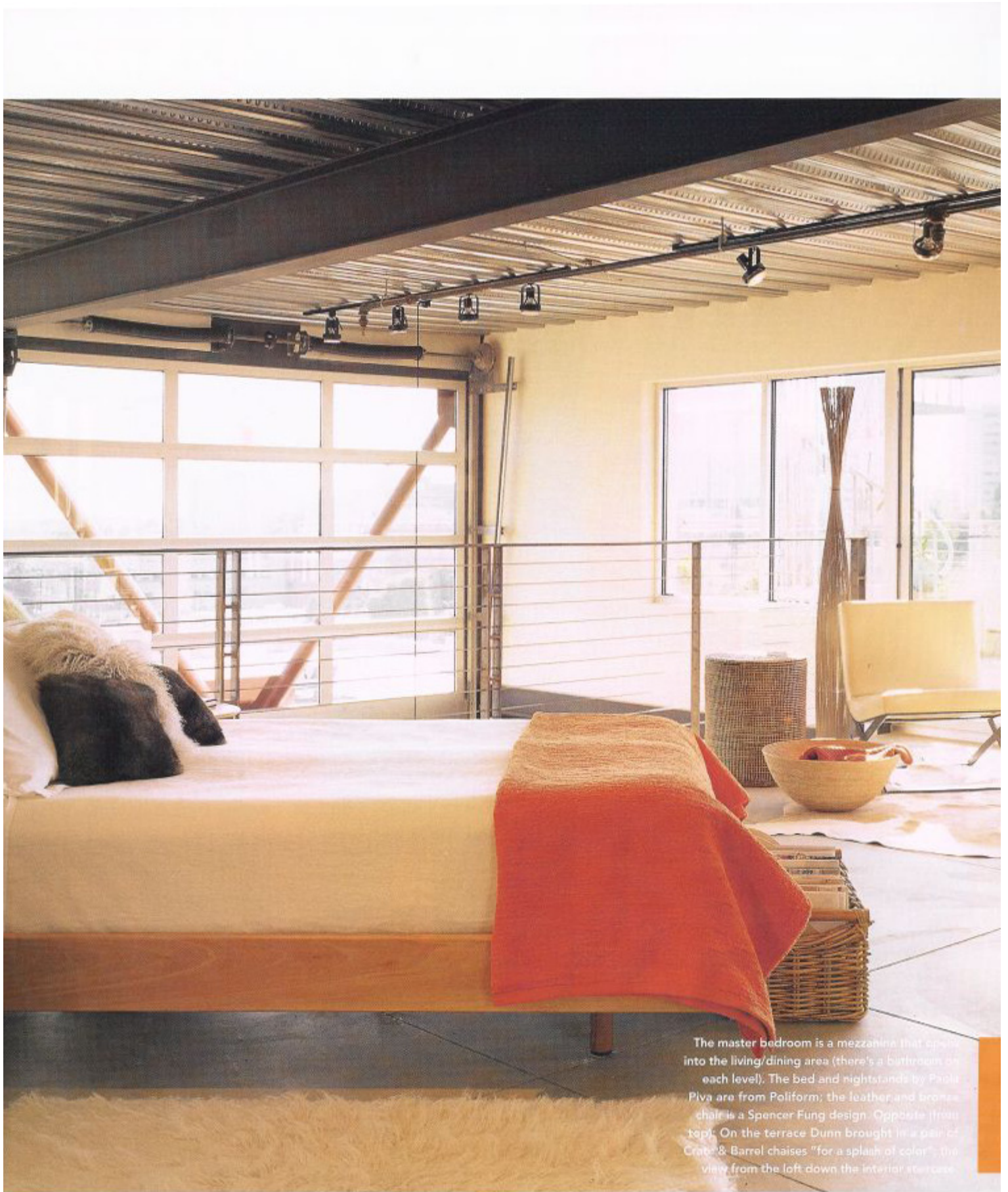
Dunn and Lambert worked at Microsoft until the 1990s. Then he took up race-car driving, specializing in endurance events. Dunn found her own endurance contest. Developing 1310 East Union, as this condo building is known, took five years of her life. It was completed in September 2001, when prospective buyers suddenly turned skittish. Sales didn't really get going until the following spring, she says.

In fact, in order to pay off the construction loan on the building, Dunn and Lambert had to sell their own unit. The couple is now living in a "beautiful, leafy neighborhood," Dunn says, "but we have to drive everywhere. So we are plotting our return to Pike-Pine." That means developing another building, which she hopes will work as well as this one.

"It was only a modest success financially," Dunn says, "but it was a big success in every other way I care about." ❁

See Resources, last pages.





The master bedroom is a mezzanine that opens into the living/dining area (there's a bathroom on each level). The bed and nightstands by Paola Piva are from Poliform; the leather and bronze chair is a Spencer Fung design. Opposite (from top): On the terrace Dunn brought in a pair of Crate & Barrel chairs "for a splash of color"; the view from the loft down the interior staircase.