

new loft living



One-space living

If open space is what has attracted you to loft living in the first place, the last thing you will want to do is break it up into individual rooms. But at the same time, it can be both uncomfortable and impractical to live your entire life out in the open. On the practical side, open space can be noisy and hard to heat; on the psychological level, there are times at which full exposure feels threatening rather than uplifting. Many loft enthusiasts who initially opt for a fully open arrangement find themselves putting up a few walls at a later date. Although many loft shells converted from twentieth-century buildings are entirely open, lofts in older buildings may feature supporting columns or piers, and these structural elements may dictate how you can subdivide the space.

While getting the balance right between openness and enclosure is very much a personal issue, it can be useful to divide activities – and hence areas within the space – into public and private. This does not entail a retreat into the convention of separate rooms, but brackets those activities together which have most in common. Overlapping sociable activities, such as relaxing, eating and cooking, keeps lines of communication open and promotes a sense of informality. Sleeping and bathing, on the other hand, are activities where we feel more vulnerable, and can usefully be combined in a more enclosed area.

When loft-livers find themselves putting up walls, in most cases it is to enclose a sleeping area. 'Nesting' is a strong human instinct and it simply feels more natural and comfortable to have the protective security of walls around you when you are sleeping. Separating sleeping areas from the rest of the household prevents

RIGHT IN THIS OPEN-PLAN LOFT, ALTHOUGH ALL AREAS REMAIN ON VIEW, THERE IS A CLEAR DISTINCTION BETWEEN DIFFERENT TYPES OF ACTIVITY. THE CENTRAL KITCHEN

SEPARATES AN EATING AREA IN THE FOREGROUND FROM THE LIVING AREA OCCUPYING ONE ARM OF THE L-SHAPED LAYOUT. FLOORING IS A UNIFYING FEATURE.





FIXTURES AND FITTINGS Transparent and waterproof, glass also lends itself to applications in wet areas such as kitchens and bathrooms, the most attention-seeking of which are glass basins and bathtubs. Glass baths, either moulded as a single unit or constructed of panels fixed with structural sealant, add a completely new dimension to soaking in the tub. There are also contemporary glass sinks on the market; these usually take the form of bowls minimally supported on pedestals or brackets.

More prosaic glass features include tabletops, counters, splashbacks and shelving, all elements with a clean-lined look, which keep the overall effect light and open.

METAL

With its industrial associations and glossy, shiny appearance, metal provides a crisp, modern edge to a scheme. By far the most common metal used in the interior is stainless steel, but zinc, copper and aluminium also have their applications. Of these, stainless steel is the strongest and most expensive; aluminium is lightweight and highly resistant to rust; zinc is highly pliable; and copper has a warm, mellow appearance but is prone to tarnishing. Metal is available in many finishes, from bright polished surfaces to matt burnished ones, and in a variety of enamelled or coated colours. It conducts heat well, so metal surfaces warm quickly and cool rapidly.

Metal means business: a stainless-steel kitchen implies an almost professional interest in cooking; metal flooring is instantly evocative of a factory floor; and metal stairs and walkways call to mind ship's companionways or aeronautical design. Such qualities are perfectly at home in a loft, where they emphasize the origins of the space.

FLOORING Like glass flooring, metal flooring tends to work best in transition areas, such as stairways and walkways on upper levels, particularly in the form of gridded or mesh panels, which provide an element of transparency. Metal floor tiles are also available, in steel or the lighter and cheaper aluminium. To prevent slipping, opt for

relief-textured tiles. Treadplate patterns – the type of surface often seen on factory floors – are most common. Metal flooring is fairly noisy and will heat and cool rapidly.

OTHER USES Sheet metal can be used to clad walls or parts of walls, or as a facing material for counters and built-in cabinets. The most common form of metal cladding is the stainless-steel splashback, now widely available from mass-market outlets. Also available in standard sizes are panels which can be stuck onto door and drawer fronts of ordinary cabinets, providing a cheap and easy way of getting the stainless-steel look. A similar approach can be adopted to clad partitions, closet doors or panels concealing built-in storage.

Used to line walls or ceilings, corrugated metal sheeting makes an overt statement. Steel kitchen and bathroom fixtures – everything from oven ranges and shelving to sinks and lavatories – are both sleek and utilitarian. Zinc makes a characterful alternative to steel. It's easy to bend, so it can be wrapped over counters or tabletops and secured by adhesive or nails. Although it scratches readily, the battered look is part of its appeal.



LEFT STAINLESS-STEEL BATHROOM
FITTINGS AND FINISHES HAVE A
CRISP, GLOSSY LOOK.

RIGHT SLIGHTLY DISTRESSED
STEEL FLOORING PROVIDES
AN INDUSTRIAL EDGE.