



A Writer's Tale

Brenda Cullerton, the author of a new book on Geoffrey Beene, resolves her wanderlust through the renovation of her family's Manhattan loft.

Sultanic splendor: Brenda Cullerton's Manhattan loft, filled with objects from her travels. The brightly colored custom-made curtains and pillows are by Demi Adeniran, at Fabrica in NYC.

It was a pit!" exclaims writer Brenda Cullerton in her throaty, theatrical voice, describing the original state of the Greenwich Village loft she and her husband, Richard DeLigter, a commercial and corporate film director, bought three years ago and renovated for their young family. "But the good thing," she continues, "was that the couple who lived here were artists, and they didn't have enough money to renovate the hell out of it—in other words, to ruin it. So it was virgin space: no Jacuzzis, no

black-granite kitchen, nothing built in at all."

For the 42-year-old author of *Geoffrey Beene*, a monograph of the fashion designer published by Abrams last fall, her new home represents a sea change. Moving from a small brownstone walk-up to a cavernous loft space brought on certain terrors. "It was the void," Cullerton says, laughing. "I was walking into the void with a growing family." Renovating the 2200-square-foot space came to embody Cullerton's struggle to reconcile her dual nature, that of explorer (in >

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the most extreme instance, she went on her honeymoon alone, as her new husband had landed his first big job just days before their scheduled departure for Tahiti) and of wife and mother.

"The house," she explains, "represents the two polarized selves: one that is about restlessness, life on the road—which I left behind when I became a settler—and the other that would be happy if it never went outdoors." The former self is most visible in the eclectic collection of artifacts arrayed throughout the loft, objects redolent of the foreign lands in which they were found. "There's no similarity or symmetry in the things I've collected," says Cullerton, whose travels have taken her to the Middle and Far East, to North Africa, Russia, and New Zealand. "It's a mishmash from everywhere. It's whatever the eye went for."

Keeping the entire loft open and accessible to children and friends was important for Cullerton. She has divided the space into three distinct areas, delineated for the most part by color rather than walls. Instead of concealing her office, she highlighted a section of the L-shaped living room, painting the area surrounding her desk and workspace a penetrating Mediterranean blue. In the rear of the loft, the bedrooms are lined up in a row, an unusual

arrangement that is evocative, Cullerton says, of monks' cells. "The front space is adult space, a very non-'90s concept. Other parents are astounded by the adulthood of it. They can't imagine that children live here." But indeed, children do live here. Jack, 8, and Norah, 3, have adjoining rooms in the back and free rein in the rest of the loft.

Now that the house serves as both home and office, accommodating its inhabitants 24 hours a day, its setting must be able to play to different moods. Cullerton sees houses as road maps to the interior life. "There's an extravagance in here, at least where the spirit is concerned. Most people, I think, are terrified of expressing themselves in their homes, afraid of being judged—which is to miss the point. A house is a sanctuary, especially in today's world. If I were half as confident and fearless outside my house as I am in it, I'd have it made."

A longtime fashion advertising copywriter, Cullerton also writes for a number of magazines and is currently at work on an autobiographical novel. Explaining her hectic pace, she says, "I'm still haunted by the wanderlust, by being a vagabond, but the same passion that went into staying on the move has now gone in, with a vengeance, to staying put."

A culture of color, clockwise from top left: The writer's office, with a Persian reverse painting on glass found in Syria hanging on an expanse of Mediterranean-blue wall, and a painted Argentine cabinet; the "cloister"—bedrooms concealed behind doors made of bird's-eye maple and handblown glass; Cullerton's children, Norah and Jack; a scepter from Archetype Gallery in NYC, and detail of an Infant of Prague statue from Guatemala; Cullerton; the dining room table, with finds including an 18th-century silk and linen altar cloth.