

LOFTY GOALS

Fine design and ease of use form a perfect partnership in a Boston condominium designed to meet its homeowner's specific needs.

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Three functions in one expansive space: the Murphy bed cabinet, the dining area and the living room work together harmoniously through color and texture.

THE LOFT DEMONSTRATES HOW SOPHISTICATED TO ELEGANT DESIGN.



WE HAVE BECOME IN BRINGING ERGONOMICS



BRIAN PATROLIA HAD A CHALLENGE FOR BRAD WALKER. HE wanted the architect, a principal with the Boston firm Ruhl Walker Architects, to create a clean, modern loft in a new raw space. He wanted an environment that was simultaneously uplifting and tranquil, where he could live, work and entertain. And he wanted everything to be within arms' reach. Patrolia, who lost the use of his legs at age nineteen, challenged Walker to design a space that would be completely accessible without appearing so. | Walker had never worked with accessibility issues this closely, but he was happy to mine the modern design vocabulary for solutions. "The challenge was to make the loft about good design. We were looking for integrated solutions for Brian, not add-ons," Walker explains. | The concept of Universal Design, a set of principles for creating spaces for a wide range of mobility differences, is increasingly popular among homeowners. Families with small children, those who have aging parents living with them, homeowners on the cusp of retirement—all want their homes to meet their

FAR LEFT: Among the loft's many sophisticated touches, a backlit Plexiglass wine rack. LEFT: A ramp from the living room leads to Brian Patrolia's office. THIS PAGE: Patrolia favors a clean, contemporary style.



THIS PAGE: The open kitchen features a cantilevered surface with clearance for a wheelchair. TOP RIGHT: A wall of Homasote divides the main space from the bedroom area. The built-in, translucent LED fixtures create ambience. BOTTOM RIGHT: Brian Patrolia at his desk.

changing needs without sacrificing good looks. The movement has yielded a number of simple, elegant solutions that are not strictly for the physically challenged.

In Patrolia's apartment, each design decision makes sense to anyone who has, for example, tripped over the curb of a shower stall. The 1,625-square-foot loft space showcases the flexibility and intelligence of contemporary design, demonstrating how sophisticated we have become in bringing ergonomics to elegant design.

THE LOFT'S MOST STRIKING

feature may be the twenty-foot-long sanded Homasote and aluminum partial-height wall, running at an angle to the exterior wall, that slowly closes down the main space to set up and separate the more intimate rooms deeper in the loft. Homasote, a recycled paper-based panel board used to insulate walls or as an exterior sheathing, is usually hidden or painted. Sanded Homasote looks and feels like suede and is highly sound absorbent. As a result, though the space is grand in scale, the room doesn't echo, a nice acoustic trick that creates intimacy. "We wanted a single gesture that would visually organize the entire loft, something that enclosed without enclosing," says Walker. "The sanded Homasote introduces a soft, touchable surface in a space where we knew we wouldn't be able to use carpet or cushiony upholstery to reduce the number of hard surfaces."

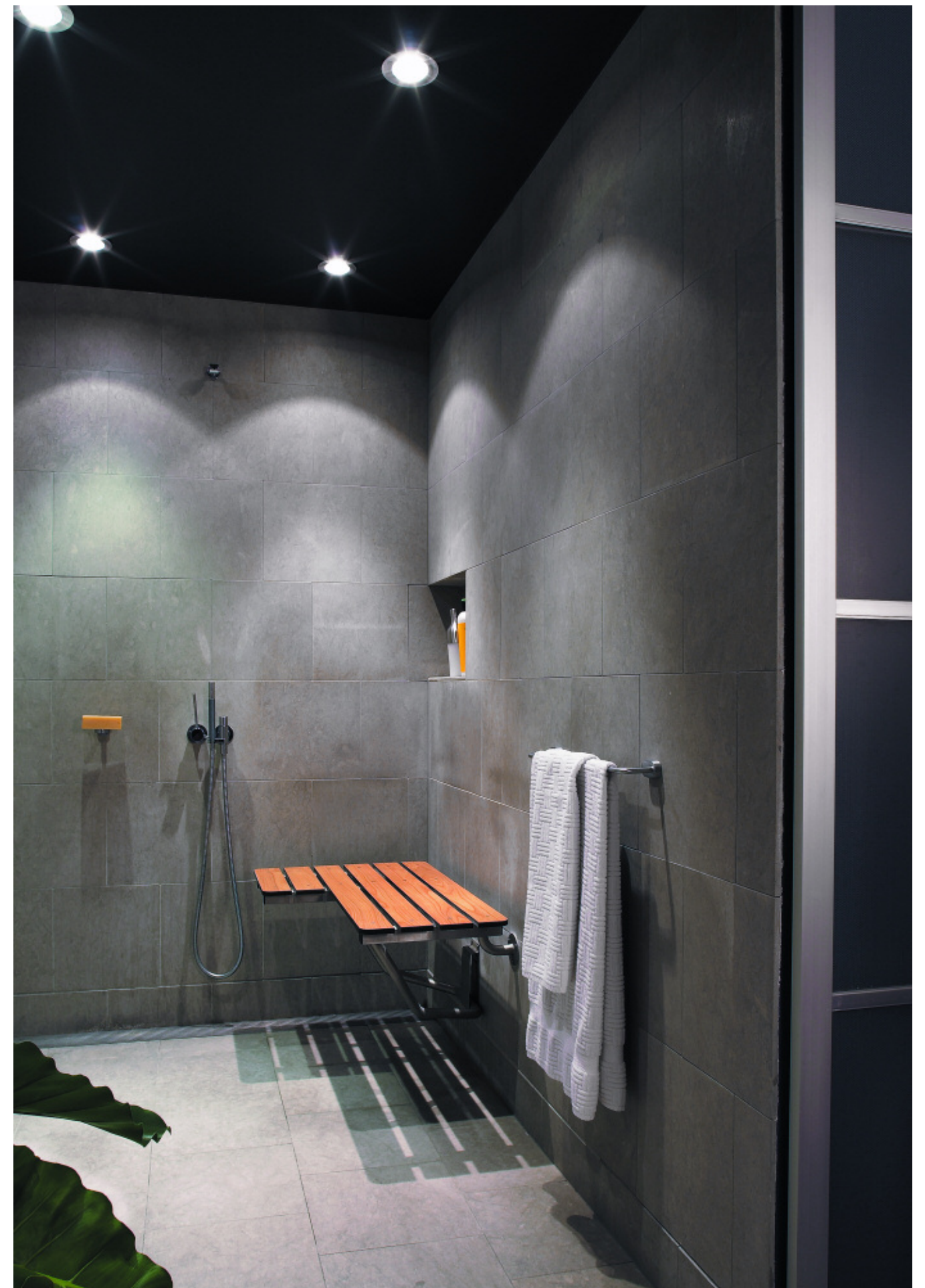
The wall borders a gentle ramp that leads up five inches to the office and master bedroom area. The driving force behind this elevation change is the curbless shower. A continuous bathroom floor without thresholds is easier to clean than a curbed unit and is safer to navigate on groggy mornings. To build the curbless shower, Walker had to raise the surrounding floor. The change in floor levels in the office and bedroom further separates these more intimate spaces from the main room. "Another way we integrated accessibility into our design was to create tiled niches in the place of the standard, off-the-shelf grab bars, which would have interfered with the desired aesthetic," Walker says.

Patrolia's kitchen features custom cabinets with unique hardware that allows him to pull down the upper shelves for access. When Walker visited Patrolia in his previous home, he noticed that the cabinet bases had been damaged by his wheelchair. To prevent this, he designed an aluminum rail that serves as a bumper. Other accessible moves include a cantilevered work





The bathroom, with its curbless shower, uses accents of teal to brighten the soft gray palette. Recessed halogens twinkle in the black ceiling. The full-length LED fixture creates a wall of light.



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THIS PAGE: The bedroom features a warmer palette of reds and grays and paintings by Boston artist Ruth Fields. TOP RIGHT: Custom cabinetry at a convenient height for Patrolia, with another integrated LED fixture. BOTTOM RIGHT: A cut-out in the Homasote wall creates a visual connection between the private bedroom and the main space.

GOOD DESIGN. WE WERE LOOKING FOR



surface with clearance for the wheelchair and custom wheeled carts that provide additional work areas and storage. The kitchen has two dish-drawer washers flanking the sink, so Patrolia always has a clean set of dishes and never has to put them away.

PATROLIA HAS A STELLAR FINE ART COLLECTION that includes three original prints by Marc Chagall and modern ceramic pieces by local artists. But as a true lover of architecture, he wants the design, fixtures and furniture to tell the story. Patrolia is delighted with the result. “The space really works because Brad worked very hard to address the problems I’d run into in my previous homes,” he says. “It’s a place in which I can live and work comfortably; everything was carefully designed, everything works well.” A software specialist in the healthcare industry, he has lived here for the past two years, splitting his time between downtown Boston and the Bahamas. This evening, as twilight falls, Patrolia moves smoothly around his home, preparing for dinner guests. In this urban loft, Ruhl Walker Architects has created a place for anyone and everyone, an accessible home that says modern, clean and universal. **NEH**

RESOURCES For more information about this home see page 211.

