

castle black

Lauren Svenstrup shares the unique tale of renting and renovating her timber loft in Chicago.

"MY HUSBAND (then boyfriend) and I decided to move in together and we both had to make a few compromises," designer Lauren Svenstrup recalls. There was the matter of style: Jim liked high-rise living while Lauren preferred vintage walk-ups. There was the matter of location: it needed to work for both of their commutes. And finally, there was the matter of budget: they needed to find a rental that fit their price range. Lauren found a 2-bedroom timber loft listed on Craigslist that seemed to check off most of the boxes, but it looked a bit dated and there'd been some interesting DIY attempts. "Jim wasn't able to go with me to see the apartment, so I met the owner by myself. Turns out he had lived there with his wife for 10 years, but they had been renting it out for the past few years after buying a single-family home for themselves nearby. I vividly remember that conversation, because a light bulb went off in my mind when I heard him say... "the interest rate on this loft is so low, that I'll own this place forever." Immediately, I realized how I was going to make this dated '90s kitchen feel like home. I was going to convince him to let me renovate it for him!"



INTERIOR DESIGN: LAUREN SVENSTRUP, OWNER
AND DESIGN DIRECTOR OF STUDIO SVEN
PHOTOGRAPHY: RYAN MCDONALD PHOTOGRAPHY
COPY: KELLI LAMB

LAUREN went home and got to work. Jim thought she was crazy, but she insisted on sending the landlord a proposal with some concept images. She laughs, "I offered to design it, hire the contractor, manage the construction, and live in the unit during construction, the only thing he had to do was write the checks!" An hour later, the response was that while it was an interesting idea, the funds weren't available so it wasn't a feasible partnership. Two more hours passed and a new correspondence came in: "I talked to my wife, I'm in. Let's do this."

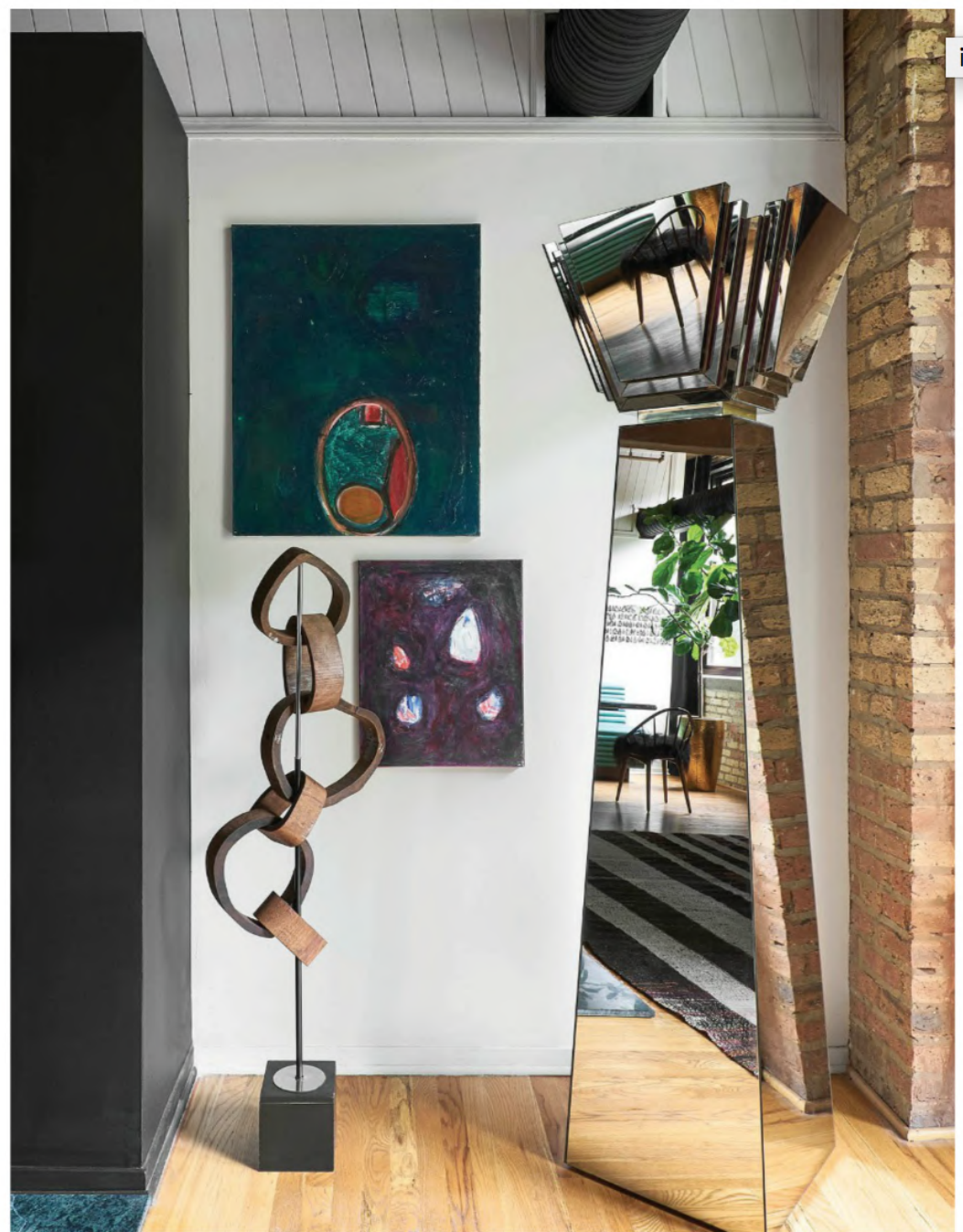




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LAUREN celebrated by purchasing a brass fireplace surround, unsure if it would fit but certain she needed it. They signed a 3-year-lease and the project was underway. To Lauren's surprise and delight, the landlord went along with whatever she presented. Though she offered to treat him as an official Studio Sven client, he told her he believed she'd know what was best. When it came the matter of the black kitchen (or as Lauren calls it, the "murdered out" kitchen), she knew it was a risk and insisted he sign off. The compromise here was adding a stainless faucet for a moment of contrast.





LAUREN also had the luxury of total support from her husband. "I always gave him veto power, but he has only ever used it one time," she says with a smile. "He said nothing when I brought home coral chaise loungers, or petite dining chairs wearing fur toupees, but when I brought home a giant '80s abstract painting that was a bit too pastel for his liking, he walked in and just said "nope!" Without skipping a beat, I ran into the other room, grabbed a tube of black acrylic paint, and a paint brush and just starting painting it black! I didn't even bother taking it off the wall. An hour later he came in agreed it could stay."



LAUREN'S creativity is clear from top to bottom in the finished loft. In the dining area, there's a wall treatment inspired by the Queen of Spain pattern from Schumacher, hand-stamped over the course of what was likely 20+ hours. She'd wanted a curved sofa but didn't have the budget for an iconic option, so she scoured Craigslist for something similar. "It leaned a little more terrible '90s than sexy '70s," she laughs, "but the curve was there. Once we cut off the rolled back and ditched the loose cushions in exchange for a tight seat and back, I had my dream sofa for a fraction of the price."

LAUREN always gives her design projects nicknames, and though it was her own home, this one was no exception. They dubbed it 'Castle Black', referencing Game of Thrones and her preferred color palette. She concludes, "It's pretty clear to anyone who knows us, that our home is my style, not Jim's, until the giant projector starts to ascend from the ceiling, then guests know they are in the right place. I still laugh thinking about coming home to 8 guys scattered around our living room watching football, perched on the mulberry sectional or hanging out in the coral loungers!"



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