

Marcus Field & Mark Irving

LOFTS



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Lofts in Suhr, Switzerland

Ernst & Niklaus Architekten

Architects Bertram Ernst and Erich Niklaus have designed three lofts in a converted spinning mill in the northern Swiss town of Suhr. Their approach to each of the apartments – for a graphic designer, journalist and manager of cultural projects respectively – has been to give ‘as much individual quality as possible at minimal cost’. Since the projects are interventions into an existing building, the decision has also been to ‘accept the given on a small as well as a large scale’.

Inside the apartments, simple, modern materials and finishes (birch plywood, MDF, glass, stainless steel and aluminium) have been used to contrast with the original exposed cast-iron columns. New partitions are generally kept short of the ceiling to emphasise the building's generous volume.

The upper floor apartments have z-shaped plans. Here, a single piece of ‘furniture’ which touches the shell only at a few restricted points is used to contain and define the kitchen, bathroom, WC and wardrobe.

Although these slick projects are a far cry from the raw charm and experimental nature of early loft living in New York or Berlin, they nevertheless reflect a growing desire amongst the creative community in Switzerland to challenge conventional ideas of domestic space.

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1 2 3 Views of the fourth and fifth floors of the former spinning mill in Suhr, Switzerland.

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Loft Living—establishing domestic spaces in buildings once constructed for industrial use—is now a social and cultural phenomenon.

From their origins as part of a subversive 1950s Manhattan scene, where the avant-garde art community colonized huge, light-filled former workshops, lofts have become a constituent part of the regeneration of run-

down industrial areas in cities as diverse as New York, Barcelona, Helsinki, London, Munich, Paris and São Paulo.

In design terms, lofts provide a unique opportunity to juxtapose daily needs with the remnants of a now obsolete industrial typology. The traces of a bygone age (steel columns, exposed brickwork and expanses of glazing) initiate a dramatic architectural experience often lacking in all but the best examples of contemporary design.

A rich narrative based on a review of thirty-one architectural schemes, this book inspects the social themes and design trends of the loft movement. Benefiting from full-color photographs—many specially commissioned—and plans, as well as interviews with architects, developers and lofts dwellers from around the world, *Lofts* offers both a critical history and an intriguing visual record of this singular building type.

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