





# Eclectic Tastes

Transforming the Van Ginkel loft from corporate to cool

How do you know a space is right for you? If you're an internationally recognized artist like Paul Van Ginkel, it's a feeling that sweeps over you. That's what Paul felt back in November of 2001 when he first saw the loft space available in the Manhattan Building in downtown Calgary. One of the oldest and most original loft spaces in the city, at the time Paul saw the space it was home to a growing tech company.

"The place was wired to the hilt with computer equipment and there were at least a dozen people working at a frantic pace," Paul says of his first visit to the building to determine the potential for his return home to Calgary from Vancouver. But like the calm in the eye of a storm, Paul stood there in the middle of the hustle and bustle and saw the space for what it was... his.

"The minute I walked in the door I knew I wanted it," Paul says of the renovated loft space

that featured 19 foot ceilings, hardwood floors, and a bank of windows that flanked the entire east side of the condo. He made an offer immediately. He loved the high ceilings, "I'd rather have height in a home over square footage - it just feels so good to have that height." Paul was lucky - the space came up for sale at the right time and this was exactly the type of space the artist needed to work and live in.

Paul transformed the space from high tech to low tech. From



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intensely corporate to intensely personal. Artwork replaced flowcharts, books replaced briefcases. Where there was once computer stations, a table of paintbrushes lounge awaiting inspiration. The only renovation he made was to install a series of track lighting aimed directly at his easel. To see the space now it's hard to imagine it as anything but an artist's studio and home. Under Paul's creative eye the home became a backdrop for an eclectic mix of giant canvasses of his own and other artists' works and his extensive collections of treasures from around the world.

His travels inspire him just as much as the objects he discovered. From the obscure little Peruvian Jesus figurine to the hand carved

masks of Venice, Paul seeks out objects that inspire him and many of them end up as reference points in his work. "People get to know me a lot better when they see my space," he says and admits what they see is fairly extreme between his eclectic tastes and his own captivating works. In fact there is always a reaction to the space by first time visitors but none mattered more to him than that of a certain woman who would become his future wife, Kristin Bell Van Ginkel

"I wasn't about showing off the space, but she was insistent on seeing it," Paul says, waving off the obvious joke of "come up and see my etchings". For Kristin, a very successful architect, she heads up the firm K.J. Bell Architecture, it was a matter of

understanding Paul a bit better. They had known each other before and when they connected on their first date, it was she who insisted on seeing his home "For me it was a reinforcement of the kind of person I thought he was. And I admit I was breathless. The loft lifestyle is something that most people don't get to experience. This loft is warm and rich and has all these wonderful things to look at. You feel like you are in the middle of a museum but yet its homey and we can entertain and really enjoy the space."

When they married in February, Paul and Kristin spent their honeymoon starting new collections together - in Mexico they scouted out over two dozen antique crosses and filled a 54 foot container with furnishings and



**T**he Manhattan Building has had a surprisingly varied history from Scottish barons to Hollywood starlets being linked to the structure that has anchored the corner of 1st and 11 Avenue for almost a hundred years.

Originally constructed to house the Fryce Jones Department Store in 1908 this Hogson and Bates design structure became an immediate landmark in the Calgary skyline. Early in its structural life the name was changed to the Trader's Building. And in 1995 the building was retro fitted to accommodate condominium development and renamed the Manhattan Lofts.

Photograph courtesy: Gurbawa Architects

- 1908** construction begins
- 1911** Fryce Jones Department Store opens to the Canadian public on Valentine's Day
- 1920** T. Harry Watts changes the name to The Traders
- 1930s** Major Hollywood movie studios use the Traders to store reels of motion pictures
- 1934** The Jenkins family grocery sets up shop
- 1942** King George VI. purchases the building and in late '43 it becomes the headquarters of the 13th division of Canada's military doctors
- 1947** Canadian federal government takes up space with offices for local branches of the National Employment Services and income tax department
- 1969** The fed government sells the building to Thesaurus Holdings and various businesses take up residence.
- 1972** L.D. Holdings buys the building and fights up the neighbourhood, housing the stock for the House of Lights
- 1975** Commerce Development Corp. buys it and it becomes the downtown location of the International Sewing Machine Service Centre
- 1978** Whipped into shape to house the Nautilus Fitness Center
- 1979** Purchased by United Management
- 1980s** Sits vacant for three years then home to various commercial tenants
- 1994** Last name change to the Manhattan and construction begins to turn the building into warehouse style condominiums offering "true loft living in the heart of the city"



The loft may be in the middle of downtown, but once inside, it's worlds away from the concrete and pavement.

architectural pieces including four, nine foot antique Mexican doors that will appear in their next home – one Kristin is designing. "In fact I was designing the house on paper as we were buying light fixtures in San Miguel. Paul was relieved to find out I liked the same things as him, We had umpteen conversations about our style likes and dislikes and to find someone that actually shares the same tastes was very refreshing. Not everyone likes very romantic, wrought iron, heavy, ornate fixtures. He has placed such a value on beautiful objects that's just so refreshing to be a part of." Right now the loft still shows more of Paul than Kristin – he encouraged her to bring as much of her stuff as she wanted. But she chose just a few pieces, keeping her carefully collected antiques including a 1889 rebuilt Knabe

grand piano made of Brazilian mahogany in storage until their new home is finished a year from now.

The Van Ginkels take downtown living to heart. Kristin can walk to her office and they enjoy heading out the door on foot to take in the excellent restaurants and shopping down on Stephen Avenue Mall. Everything is close by, The Performing Arts Center, even the Round Up Centre (where Paul has participated in the Stampede Art Show and Sale for the past fourteen years) is only a fifteen minute walk. The loft may be in the middle of downtown, but once inside, it's worlds away from the concrete and pavement. Paul and Kristin have created a rich oasis of worldly treasures that inspire their respective creative talents.

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