

# MILLEU

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A WORLD OF CHANGE



# LOFTY PURSUITS

A designer cultivates an urban rustic space that feels like home

Above: Designer Aaron Rambo's Houston loft is on the second floor of the historic Bienville Furniture Company building. Right: Rambo combines both rustic and gilded, the latter accomplished by introducing a pair of French Louis XVI-style chairs, upholstered in raw silk. The vintage American leather sofa comes from the office of a Houston judge.



INTERIOR DESIGN BY **AARON RAMBO**  
PRODUCED BY **AARON RAMBO**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **PETER VITALE**  
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*“I shop for a living and can take home the choice pieces I love.”*

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esigner and store owner Aaron Rambo admits to sometimes missing the comforts of a new building, but he'd still rather live in his nineteenth-century industrial loft, with its exposed brick wall, uneven floors, and open rafters. “Even though I don't have an oven, I've been here now for seven years, and I don't know any other way to live,” he says.

Rambo has turned the top floor of Houston's historic 1860s Bienville Furniture Company building into a stylish and comfortable space. Many of the buildings in this part of Houston, the city's original warehouse district, have been transformed into virtual hives of working artists; in his own building, artists' studios occupy the ground floor. The streetside facade is marked by the original iron balconies and a pair of French doors added during a previous restoration. The doors remain open all day, as he likes ready access to the outdoors.

For decorative accessories and furnishings, Rambo draws upon the resources of his successful Houston store, Found, which he opened with business partner Ruth Davis six years ago. “Everyone comes to Houston to shop, and we cannot keep up with the demand,” he says. Texan by birth, he was raised in a small rural town and started off as a florist and event planner. “I can't recall ever thinking I wanted to be a decorator, or having a store, but from doing flowers you get involved in people's houses — and that's how it all started.”

While most of the architectural elements are original, the floor throughout is a newly installed marine-grade chipboard, which has already taken on an intriguing patina. “I love tattered, torn, rusty, and chipped paint,” he exclaims, “but I always like to add a touch of gilding.” By that, he points to a pair of gilded Louis XVI-style chairs in the living area. The chandelier, a Brutalist 1970s-era brass fixture, dominates the room. He is in an enviable situation for, as he admits, “I shop for a living and can take home the choice pieces I love.”

The dining table doubles as a desk, as Rambo often brings his work home at the end of the day. However, when he entertains, “I add extra chairs and open up the balcony doors. It is just like eating outside.”

His kitchen is dominated by a seven-foot letter A that hangs on the wall, a find from a local antiques show. The rest of the



Left: Rambo painted the steps to a bedroom mezzanine white, adding brightness to the interior. Vintage French linens cover the bed. This page: Part sculpture, part decorative accessory, a large ball of string rests amid tiny sandbags from John Derian Company in New York.

This page, below: A vignette in the living area consists of *Owlette* (2003) by Corinne Jones, a small framed dollar-bill envelope by Andy Warhol, a vintage neon sign spelling out "communication", and a series of Scandinavian paintings, collectively called *Swedish Industrial* (circa 1933). This page, right: Elsewhere in the room is a nineteenth-century French buffet, a work on paper by Howard Sherman, and a vintage American brass lamp. Far right: In the living area, a conversation grouping includes a Verellen linen-slipcovered sofa, a jehs+laub lounge chair by Kartell, a vintage French garden table, and an eighteenth-century Swedish stool.



furnishings are equally inventive. The kitchen island, for instance, is a vintage produce display found at a salvage yard. After being covered with a new top, it has assumed a new identity and provides much needed storage. Its surface is illuminated from above by a wire basket that has been flipped over and fitted with a light bulb.

While the loft didn't need much work when Rambo moved in, he did lighten things up by repainting the stairs to the bedroom white, as they were what he likens to "the color of a gymnasium floor." The interiors are illuminated by natural light streaming through four skylights. He sleeps directly under one skylight, and while it is hard to sleep in, Rambo loves the one in the bathroom. "I can shower in natural sunlight!"

As the name of his business states, Rambo has an uncanny ability to take found objects and reinvent them, indeed live with them, in new ways. ■





Left: The kitchen island was once an old produce display stand that Rambo has since resurfaced. The barstool is vintage Italian brass, and the custom light fixture, designed by Rambo, was originally an industrial basket. Colorful artwork is by Houston artist Jane Eifler. Above: Three Hans Wegner-inspired Wishbone chairs, along with an eighteenth-century Louis XVI-style side chair with its original paint and vintage leather, are set at an expandable Parson's dining table. Below: A vintage American carved stone garden fragment sits atop old copies of *The New York Times*.

