



A STUDY IN CONTRASTS

IN A SLEEK DOWNTOWN MEMPHIS LOFT, A DUO OF ARKANSAS NATIVES—AND LONGTIME FRIENDS—COLLABORATE TO CREATE A HOME WHERE LESS IS VERY MUCH MORE

Left: Sleek B&B Italia bookcases combine both form and function in the main living room.

Below: On the multi-purpose first floor, Reid-Rice's own paintings set the tone for the white-on-black aesthetic found throughout the condo.



A BARE BULB WOULD HAVE DONE.

An Edison bulb, maybe—something simple. The focal point was, after all, the urban sprawl stretching out behind the floor-to-ceiling panes of glass: the buzz of G.E. Patterson Avenue below, the snaggleteethed Memphis skyline beyond.

Wouldn't a complicated fixture just, you know, take away from that? "But then we found this," says interior designer Laura Bartell, pinching slender fingers around an even more slender cable, which is attached to a delicate bare bulb—no shade, no pretense. The cable affixes to the ceiling via a sparse constellation of bolts, and the bulb dangles inches above a mirrored-glass bedside table. It's eye-catchingly stark, the black of the cable meeting the white of the walls. And it's deceptively simple.

Because, of course, there's nothing simple about it.

When you're an architect (like homeowner Colette Reid-Rice), and

one of your college roommates is an interior designer who's worked with some of the biggest names in the industry (as is the case with Bartell), there's nothing "simple" that occurs when the two of you collaborate on finishing out your downtown Memphis loft. There's nothing simple about arranging the furniture. There's nothing simple about selecting art. And there's certainly nothing simple about cabling up a minimalist Spanish light fixture.

"I probably tried out 400 options," says Reid-Rice, who, ever the spatial analyst, taped up each of the possible cable arrangements before having the fixture installed. "I'd tape it up, take a photo, and then I sent the photos to Laura all at once."

"I said, 'Well, I like this one, but it needs to be way lower here, pulled over here, and all this,'" Bartell chimes in, casting an eye to the ceiling. "And then? We got it."



Above: In the living room, a sleek, sculptured sofa provides ample seating for entertaining; the hallway and the doors beyond are painted a creamy charcoal.

Right: The silver backsplash in the white-on-white kitchen recalls Andy Warhol's Silver Factory, in keeping with Reid-Rice's love of all things '70s glam.



Left: Bartell and Reid-Rice chose flexible, multi-functional furnishings for the living spaces, like this Tom Dixon screw table and adjustable Tolomeo floor lamp.

It's these, *erm*, lightbulb moments—or “aha!” moments, as Reid-Rice calls them—that, when pieced together, form the foundation for this minimalist, open-concept haven, which Reid-Rice shares with her husband, Keith Rice, and two cats, Nakito and Vladimir. Taken individually, these “moments” may seem insignificant—small details. Brought together, they create an almost shockingly consistent aesthetic. Black and white. Less is more. A place where everything—from a white porcelain bowl of black-licorice jelly beans to a glittering disco-ball mobile—has a purpose.

“Everything plays a part,” Reid-Rice says, snacking on a handful of those black jelly beans she'd scooped up before coming upstairs. As we tour the space, we're talking about all of the minute decisions that she and Bartell made together while outfitting this space, a towering three-floor condominium in Memphis' trendy South Main neighborhood. “Nothing gets lost. Or at least it shouldn't. There are so few things, everything should have a purpose.”

Which, she tells me, is precisely why she needed Bartell.

The design-minded friends' personal history is a long one—they first met as Kappa Kappa Gamma sisters at the University of Arkansas. Though Reid-Rice studied microbiology and Bartell elementary education, they were like-minded in their tendency to overanalyze. “And in our perfectionism,” Bartell is quick to add. And, it would seem, in their intuitive knack for how function meets form—a trait that led Bartell to Par-

sons School of Design and then on to some A-list New York City projects (hello, Tom Ford flagship store) before retracing her steps back to Arkansas to hang her shingle, and which led Reid-Rice to architecture school in Memphis, where she eventually landed her current position with a firm specializing in entertainment and hospitality (hello, Mississippi River casinos).

It was in Memphis that Reid-Rice and her husband decided to put down roots, purchasing this condo some nine years ago. But seven years later, it became clear that it needed to be *finished*. She needed someone

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to help her find the right furniture, the right art, the right paint. More than anything, she needed someone with whom she could bounce ideas around. So in came Bartell, and up went a gigantic wall of magazine tears, inspiration photos and fabric samples, which the pair analyzed and discussed and culled until a theme emerged: the meeting of light and dark, with an homage to '70s glam. And then up went the disco balls.

The disco balls were, of course, an “aha!”

moment—the very first one, actually.

“We started by considering some sort of sculptural light, and then we thought about the artist Calder and his mobiles,” says Bartell. “And then one night, it was like, go get some disco balls—get a lot of them—and stagger them.”

“And I was like, ‘Oh yeah, I'll do it!’” says Reid-Rice. “I'd actually been thinking the same thing.”

Turns out the pair thought similarly about a lot of things. But that's the key: They *thought*. A lot. They thought about how the first-floor living area needed to be a catch-all kind of space—dining, entertaining, working—and how they'd need to keep the furnishings sculptural, yet flexible. They thought about how art needed to mean something—how a towering graphite-and-vellum piece by Memphis artist Terri Jones was so architectural, so very much representative of Reid-Rice's trade. They thought about choosing furnishings that could serve multiple purposes—like a Tom Dixon screw table that changes from cocktail to dining in the flick of a wrist. And they thought a lot about this idea of dark meeting light, of contrasts, of shadows.

“I really wish you could see this at night,” Bartell tells me more than once. “That's when it really comes to life.”

But when a space is this well-thought-out, when you've got this kind of collaboration between architect and designer, friend and friend, you don't need any light tricks to see it come to life. It just works.

It's just that simple. **AL**

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