

## Lofty Ideals

Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz concocts a hip, sophisticated image for an exclusive apartment building in New York.

"THE FREEDOM TO DESIGN your own living environment is the ultimate luxury," declares Ed Baquero, who created the Loft—a renovated warehouse in Soho—to offer wealthy dwellers (ranging from artists to rock stars) just such a freedom. To dream up a hip design statement for the building's lobby and landmark façade, Baquero and partner Stephen Touhey of Landmark Development turned to designer Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz. They were so charmed by the designer's otherworldly talents and down-to-earth demeanor that they eventually expanded the project over the course of a year to include the wine cellar and architectural details in all 13 of the \$3 million-plus apartments.

The Loft's tony image is firmly established in the 25-ft.-by-15-ft. lobby, for which the owners had one request, says Noriega-Ortiz: "for it to be sexy, but serene." Working with design director Paul Latham, he devised a sculptural, almost monochromatic space that gives primacy to voluptuous surface textures. "We looked for materials associated with sensuality," he continues, explaining the choice of buttery latex draperies and vanilla-hued, padded leather walls. The onyx-faced concierge desk was designed to appear as a solid piece, lending gravity to the otherwise ethereal space—which features custom light fixtures that float seemingly unsupported. The chandelier, fabricated of nickel wire-wrapped, hand-cut glass squares mounted to a sandblasted acrylic dome, was inspired by Paco Rabanne dresses from the '70s. "I thought a little hint of fashion was appropriate," says Noriega-Ortiz. →

*Right: The elevator vestibule (above), with its aluminum-leaf cove and grey draperies, continues themes established in the main lobby (right)—sensual materials and a geometric orderliness.*



PHOTOGRAPHY: ANTOINE BOOTZ

The designers collaborated with wine consultant Christine Hawley on the basement level “enoteca”—a series of private wine vaults opening off a shared dining/tasting room. Answering Baquero’s request for “a French wine cellar with an edge,” Noriega-Ortiz balanced earthen elements, like rough-hewn plaster, with sleek materials and an absence of fussiness. “Because the room is small,” explains Noriega-Ortiz, “we didn’t want to add much color or many shapes.” Vaulted ceilings and a diagonal grid of wood-and-concrete floors visually enlarge and order the space, which is furnished with antique English high-backed chairs upholstered in a wine-color velvet, a colored oak table, and custom acrylic chairs by Plexi-craft.

In a business centered on “exceeding peoples’ expectations,” says Baquero, Noriega-Ortiz has achieved exactly that. —*Jen Renzi*

*This page: The approach (below) from the elevator to the earthen, French-themed cellar dining room (right). Two steps below the dining level are the wine vaults (below, right) for the smaller apartments, with crushed gravel and limestone floors.*

UPHOLSTERY, DRAPERIES: **K. FLAM ASSOC.** CARPET: **ARCHITECTURAL FLOORING.** STOOL: **DONZELLA.** CHANDELIER: **...AND BOB’S YOUR UNCLE.** LATEX: **CANAL RUBBER.** LEATHER: **CORTINA LEATHER.** DRAPERY FABRIC: **BART HALPERN.** ALUMINUM LEAF: **JUDY EISLER.** WALL SCONCES: **HOLLY HUNT.** CONSOLE: **ROOMS AND GARDENS.** TABLE: **AVERY ON BOND.** ANTIQUE CHAIRS: **CARLOS DE LA PUENTE.** LIGHTING DESIGN: **THOMPSON SEARS.** CONTRACTOR: **LANDMARK DEVELOPMENT.**

