

Hidden treasures

Engineer Patrick Pierre has transformed his 14th-century home from a cramped apartment to a large space where entire rooms hide behind roll-out walls

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When engineer Patrick Pierre decided to convert his apartment in Lyon's medieval, cobblestoned heart on the far bank of the Saône back to its original incarnation as a single, huge, grand, living space, he came up with an ingenious solution for exploiting the limited living space to the full and hiding away the minutiae of daily life.

He simply rolled it out of sight – the stove, the pots and pans, shirts and shoes that spoil the clean lines of a modern live/work space. And he did it all with tracking technology, designing a kitchen – complete with appliances, sink, and worktop – which rolls out when needed, and a walk-in dressing room-cum-wardrobe that does the same. During the times when these two spaces are not needed, Patrick and his partner Bozena simply slide them back – presenting, when closed, decorative but unrevealing floor-to-ceiling surfaces – to create a large, open space in which to live and work.

'It's not that expensive a system, though it does require careful installation, especially where plumbing is required,' says Patrick, who has already installed copies of his prototypes elsewhere in France. 'I showed the kitchen at the Salon des Arts Menagers in Geneva last year, where it won the Grand Prix de l'Exceptionnel,' he adds proudly. Rolling open his kitchen – which can be fitted in any finish, from wood to stainless steel to synthetics – he reveals a built-in oven, hob, washing machine, refrigerator, pan drawer and larder, with enough workspace to prepare dinner for 10 – a common event on the couple's social calendar.

The sleek, subtle surfaces of the rolled-away kitchen – a stunning semi-circle of softly glowing mild steel, which expands from just 4 sq m into 8 sq m when in use – and the wardrobe – brown-painted MDF with a matt oiled finish that resembles fine leather – perfectly complement the ancient



FAR LEFT, IN THE DINING AREA, AN OLD FRENCH OAK DINING TABLE IS DRESSED UP WITH REPRO CHARLES EAMES CHAIRS. THE HUGE LEATHER-LIKE CUPBOARD CONCEALS WALK-IN WARDROBES. LIGHTING IS THEATRE HALOGEN SPOTLIGHTS SUSPENDED LOW OVER THE TABLE. THIS PICTURE, IN THE LIVING AREA, JUNK-SHOP CHAIRS HAVE BEEN REUPHOLSTERED AND COMPLEMENT A FIFTIES' LEATHER ARMCHAIR





THE KITCHEN CAN BE CUSTOM-TAILORED IN TERMS OF FINISH AND ENERGY SOURCES. THE CURVED, LEATHER-LOOK WALL CONCEALS ALL THE NECESSARY ROOM AND APPLIANCES FOR A FULLY EQUIPPED WORKSPACE



shell of the loft, which has plenty of space for a grand dining space at one end, underneath the magnificent, 16th-century windows, as well as a living area around an original fireplace, an office in the middle of the space, a bathroom with mullioned windows overlooking a beautiful courtyard at the other end, and a sleeping gallery above. 'We don't have children, so this is a perfect arrangement for us,' says Patrick.

When he moved in 15 years ago, the building – which dates back to 1300 and was, for centuries, a single-family home – had long been converted into apartments. For 11 increasingly frustrating years, Patrick lived in a boxy compartmentalised space set partly over two storeys, but the restrictive space finally compelled him to restore his first-floor residence to the grand reception room it used to be.

There were some wonderful surprises in the renovation:

'It was not until we stripped away a false ceiling to reveal the beams that we discovered the room's fabulous origin ceiling, painted red with motifs in the 16th century,' he says. Now the Renaissance stares the 21st century in the face: the loft floor is uncompromisingly modern, grey concrete. Limewashed walls help bridge the 500-year gap while the entire 20th century is represented in the furnishings, which include many art deco and modernist pieces, as well as one or two antiques and some quirky contemporary additions. Of these, one of the most notable has to be the US penitentiary-issue stainless steel lavatory which, set against medieval mullioned windows and complementing a stunning Andrée Putman steel sink, looks incredibly chic.

Another innovative idea is the room's cinema seats, salvaged from a local cinema, for entertaining. When the

A PAIR OF FOLDING SEATS, SALVAGED FROM A LOCAL CINEMA, ARE OCCASIONALLY RETURNED TO THEIR ORIGINAL USE, THANKS TO HUGE WALLS ON WHICH PATRICK PROJECTS FILMS FOR FRIENDS, CREATING A MEDIEVAL MEDIA ROOM





are not in use, they fold up flush, in pairs, against the walls.

'We wanted to mix periods, but be predominantly modern, in spite of the fact the ancient is always with us in the walls and the ceiling,' says Patrick, acknowledging that his neighbourhood, Vieux-Lyon, is a World Heritage Site comprising the largest agglomeration of medieval and renaissance buildings outside Venice. In this situation, Patrick's roll-out kitchen and dressing-room seem strangely appropriate – something that could well have been drawn up by Leonardo da Vinci, centuries before Patrick dreamed it up himself and made it a 21st-century reality **idFX**

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ABOVE, ALTHOUGH THE APARTMENT ALWAYS FEATURED A BEDROOM ON THE UPPER FLOOR, PATRICK DEMOLISHED THE EXISTING STRUCTURE AND INSTALLED A NEW STAIRCASE TO THE SLEEPING LOFT, WHILE RETAINING THE ORIGINAL WOOD FLOORBOARDS; LEFT, THE STAINLESS STEEL LOGGERE LAVATORY IS STANDARD US PRISON ISSUE, AND HAS BEEN PAIRED WITH A STAINLESS STEEL SINK BY ANDREE PUTMAN, FROM SOPHA INDUSTRIES