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Loft Living

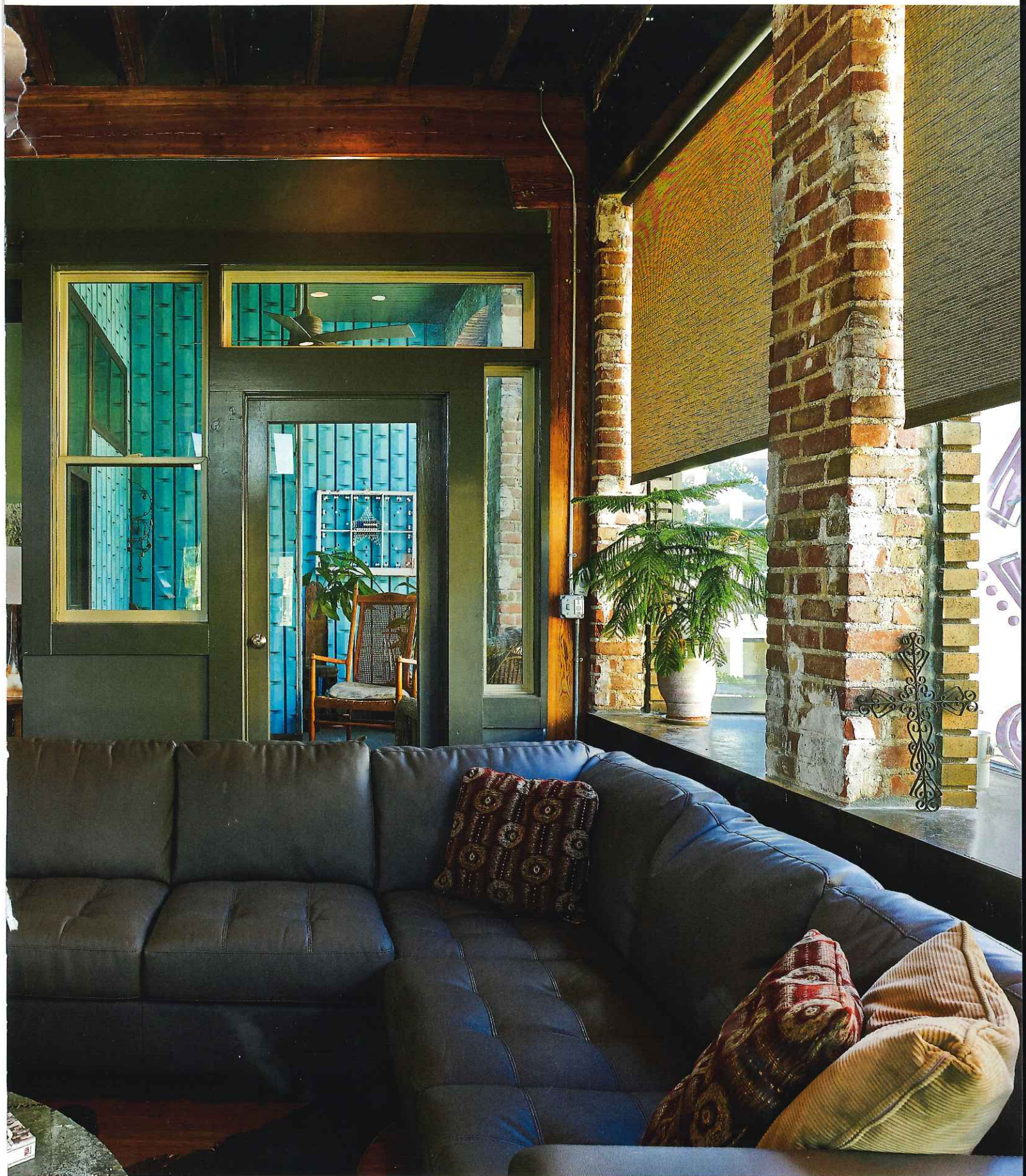
SUE AND JIMMY JOHNSON COMBINE
WORK AND LIFE IN THEIR DOWNTOWN BIRMINGHAM
HOME. A DOGGIE DAYCARE TAKES UP THE
GROUND FLOOR AND ROOF, AND THEY LIVE IN
THE SECOND FLOOR LOFT SPACE.

As Sue and Jimmy Johnson began to get a little bit older, they wanted to downsize, be close to a cultural center, live greener, and exercise more. After a job loss, the Johnsons were looking for a place to re-create themselves and combine work and life in one space.

In seeking a location suited to those needs, the old furniture store at 112 18th Street North in downtown Birmingham provided enough open space for them to build exactly what they

TEXT BY LINDSAY MOTT
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHERWOOD COX







A light fixture made out of 76 Coca-Cola bottles illuminates the kitchen, which features cabinets and furniture made of the building's original wood.



wanted to reduce their carbon footprint. The bottom floor is home to their dog daycare, Dog Days of Birmingham, and the second floor is their 2,000-square-foot home.

Working with Appleseed Workshops in Birmingham, the Johnsons were able to take a lot of the wood from rafters and beams in the building and use it in new ways. The 100-year-old heart pine now forms sliding barn-like doors, countertops, and cabinets. A beam even forms the legs on the couple's glass kitchen table.

"We wanted them to take the materials they pulled out of the building and put it back in the building," Sue says. "It's evident in the architecture."

In sticking with this theme, the blue metal walls of the screened porch were taken from the building's original facade. In removing flooring, they discovered the original 100-year-old heart pine floors.

According to Jimmy, the building was built around 1917, and it's hard to find wood like that these days. "That was important to us," he says. "We were determined to go as green as possible."





In building a new space, the Johnsons used as much metal and wood as possible from the original building and even discovered the original 100-year-old heart pine flooring.



Sue describes the look as “rustic, modern, urban style” that uses a lot of reclaimed wood and metal, exposed brick, and exposed rafters. The windows are their original size, allowing for abundant natural light and great views of Birmingham.

One interesting feature in the house is the chandelier made out of Coca-Cola bottles. Jimmy says they couldn’t find a fixture they liked, so the architect supplied this idea and they went for it. He says that the people working on the house actually drank out of the approximately 76 bottles that were used in the fixture, and there’s also some irony to it. Their bathroom wall has an advertisement for Wiseola, a Coke competitor, that was previously on an exterior wall, so “using the motif was quite appropriate,” Jimmy says.

The Johnsons were glad to downsize but also needed a little extra space for their children and grandchildren. Their second bedroom has a loft space within it, and a ladder leads up to the sleeping nook and play area.

Having the doggie daycare and boarding area below can make for some noisy nights, but the Johnsons enjoy the dogs and their proximity to work. The building also has rooftop access with an area for the dogs to play.

After the five-month renovation, the Johnsons moved in and immediately began reaping the rewards of this change in their lives. “We just feel like we’re living,” Sue says. “We feel like our lives are richer because of where we live and our lifestyle.”