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STUDIO D'ARC'S LIVE/WORK STUDIO IN PITTSBURGH  
COVERS PRETTY WELL EVERY ASPECT OF SUSTAINABLE BUILDING —  
IT'S CONTAINED, USES LOCAL MATERIALS,  
MAKES THE MOST OF NATURAL LIGHT AND VENTILATION  
AND DIALOGUES WITH ITS CONTEXT

# IRON CITY COOL

BY RAYMUND RYAN  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY EDWARD MASSERY

Live/Work Studio is an evocative insertion into the fabric of Pittsburgh's South Side. Now reinventing itself after the demise of heavy industry a quarter century ago, that era glimpsed in *The Deer Hunter* and *Flashdance*, Pittsburgh survives with several distinct neighbourhoods in which the carcasses of factories and warehouses are mixed with traditional two- or three-storey houses. Bracketed by late-19th-century homes, Live/Work Studio is domestic and intimate. Yet its materiality makes reference to the brewery and loading docks immediately across the street.

Gerard Damiani and Debbie Battistone designed, live in and operate their practice, studio d'ARC Architects, from the building. They also constructed much of it themselves. It is, they say, a case study, a prototype for inhabiting Pittsburgh today.

Recollecting the city's industrial vernacular, the exterior palette of corrugated metal, steel plate, timber slats and glass is used in a contemporary, planar way. The weathered steel

**LEFT** On a formerly vacant lot in Pittsburgh's South Side neighbourhood, studio d'ARC's infill project relates to its surroundings through scale and material palette. On the front facade, a composition of corrugated steel, steel plate and wooden slats recollects the vernacular and generates a contemporary modernist impression.



**A  
RETRACTABLE  
SKYLIGHT  
OVER  
THE DOUBLE-  
HEIGHT  
DINING AREA  
BRINGS IN  
ABUNDANT  
DAYLIGHT  
AND ALLOWS  
FOR CROSS-  
VENTILATION**

**ABOVE** At ground level, the kitchen and dining area are centrally placed. On one side of the entranceway, a stair leads up to the second floor. On the other, channel glass separates the living quarters from the garage.

**RIGHT** The living area, at the back of the house, communicates with the enclosed garden. Windows into the garden cross-ventilate with a retractable skylight at roof level above the double-height dining area. The skylight acts as a thermal chimney, cooling through a stack effect. Raw concrete block party walls and maple built-ins, panelling and flooring combine for a unified and uncomplicated look.



stoop projects out above the pavement. The mahogany slats screen meters for electricity and gas, and rise to form the balustrade of a roof terrace above. One section of the screen swings out as a shutter in front of a second-floor window. An almost seamless garage door protects one of Damiani's two classic 1967 Volvos: a white 122S and a green 123GT. Neighbours may also recognize Live/Work Studio's two other occupants: a friendly dog, Ply, and a very shy cat, Cinder.

Plywood and cinder block are, in fact, key to the interior. Parallel party walls are made from locally manufactured block that secretes rust stains due to its high iron oxide content. Maple plywood is used for interior balustrades, well-stocked bookshelves colonizing the north wall, and kitchen units – one of which can glide about on casters. The central dining area is double height and illuminated by a retractable skylight high above. The garage, which shares street frontage with an entry hall, is partially enclosed by translucent channel glass that brings a shadowy glow into the hallway. From the centre of the house, the living space extends east past a television cabinet and an apparently free-standing fireplace into a small yard with one Virginia magnolia, Pennsylvania bluestone paving, and a log rack made from weathered steel I-beams.

"We tried to use as many regional materials as possible," says Damiani. The yard can be accessed from one of the many narrow pedestrian lanes dating from Pittsburgh's era of industrial might a century ago. It also contains a block of limestone, used as a bench, salvaged from an abandoned local bridge. Less formal than the front, the rear facade is skinned in asphalt shingles, a humble material attended to with the architects' customary precision, and incised with a long, narrow horizontal window. From the couple's bedroom on the upper level, a small clear section allows views and a white



**ABOVE** The architects' studio is bathed in light from the large west-facing front window. Custom-designed furniture and built-in bookshelves make the space hyper-functional. An open-riser stair ascends to the roof terrace.

**LEFT** On the second floor, a glass bridge and guardrail traverse the void, connecting the studio with the sleeping quarters. A niche in front of the bedroom serves as a small office.

**BELOW** At the back of the house, a long horizontal opening brings daylight into the bedroom.



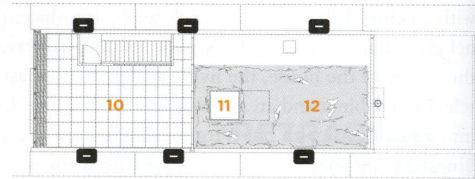


**TOP** Cinder block walls extend from the house to form the garden walls. The back of the fireplace, nested in the window wall, juts out into the garden and is clad in weathering steel. The rear facade is skinned in asphalt shingles.

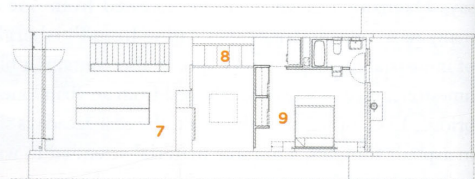
**BOTTOM** Access to the rooftop terrace is through a small penthouse structure. From there, the inhabitants and their guests enjoy 360 degrees of urban views. Provision was made for part of the roof to be planted with sedum.

## ACCORDING TO DAMIANI AND BATTISTONE, LIVE/WORK STUDIO IS A CASE STUDY, A PROTOTYPE FOR INHABITING PITTSBURGH TODAY

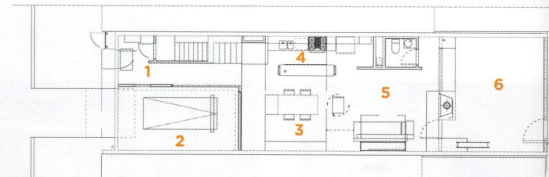
### ROOFTOP



### SECOND FLOOR



### GROUND FLOOR



- |               |                                   |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 Entry hall  | 8 Bridge                          |
| 2 Garage      | 9 Bedroom                         |
| 3 Dining area | 10 Roof garden                    |
| 4 Kitchen     | 11 Horizontal sliding roof window |
| 5 Living room | 12 Living roof                    |
| 6 Garden      |                                   |
| 7 Studio      |                                   |

film ensures privacy. Bedroom and office are to either side of the central double-height space and linked by a glass-floored bridge directly above the kitchen area.

From their open-plan studio, with its custom furniture made from laminated maple strips, the architects can now survey the completed interior of their home and look across the street into South Side. The large, almost cyclopean picture window admits air and afternoon light deep into the house, where it mixes with air and light from the central skylight and from the glazed opening to the rear. A staircase with open risers ascends from the studio zone into a small penthouse structure that gives access to the roof deck and a garden soon to be planted with sedum; the architects call it “a living roof.”

From up there, Damiani, Battistone and their frequent guests enjoy views of an iconic octagonal clock on the neighbouring brewery, of office towers and spires in the downtown core, and of freight trains snaking and hooting along the adjacent hillsides. Thus Live/Work Studio both reconsiders the content of the city and allows Pittsburgh to be freshly observed. **AZ**