

CHANGING KALEIDOSCOPE





In designer Karim Rashid's
Chelsea loft, the colors are
almost as hot as he is

INTERIOR DESIGN BY KARIM RASHID

TEXT BY LISA S. KAHN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BILYANA DIMITROVA

CHROME YELLOW INTERACTS with hot pink as turquoise chimes in. Pop-art patterns and surreal shapes appear against a backdrop of white walls and floors, suggesting a comic strip gone psychedelic. You're in the 2,000-square-foot Chelsea loft of designer Karim Rashid, and though he refers to himself as a "sensual minimalist," there's nothing minimal about the explosion of visual stimuli that surrounds you.

Born in Cairo and raised mostly in Canada, Rashid, 45, is an ultramodern Renaissance man who has parlayed his interests in art, fashion, product packaging, jewelry, furniture and electronic house music into a global empire he oversees from New York. He's put his signature curves and incandescent colors on everything from Target hand soap to Prada haute couture.

Rashid shares this apartment with his wife, digital artist Megan Lang. It's located in a 105-year-old onetime factory the designer bought in 1998 and renovated the following year to contain both a home and a work space.

"I have a six-second commute," Rashid boasts, noting that his design studio is just downstairs. "I'm thinking of putting in a pole I can slide down like Batman."

CONTINUED

Although one big space, Karim Rashid's comfortable and contemporary Chelsea loft features four different living areas, each defined by furniture that the designer describes as soft, organic and "almost blobby."





A favorite of the musician Prince, the Omni couch, above, comes in five sections. When arranged in a circular pattern, it seats up to 12. The white Frighetto Spline sofa, left, provides perfect contrast to the custom wallpaper.

When he found the place, he says, it was a “completely dilapidated” haven for rats and pigeons that hadn’t been touched in 20 years. And Rashid had to redo the building from scratch. Renovations included new plumbing and electrical wiring along with new windows, which he extended from floor to ceiling while maintaining their original width. “If you don’t widen them, you keep the integrity of the building’s structure, and it’s also less expensive,” he explains.

Once the infrastructure of the apartment was complete, what remained was the configuration of the living areas. “The problem with most New York lofts is that you end up with long, narrow passages that interrupt the space,” Rashid says. “Daylight is at a premium in this city.”

To address this concern, the designer built a “utility artery” along the east wall that houses the washer, dryer, water heater, closets and two baths, where motion detectors automatically control the faucets and toilets. (Rashid likes it when technology takes the hands out of “hands-on”—it’s part of his war against the mundane, his crusade to ban the banal from our lives.)

What remains is a huge, light-filled central area containing the open kitchen, a rear bedroom and the equivalent of four “living rooms” that the





In the kitchen, left, Rashid kept storage and appliances in a single line, while Wilsonart custom laminate kitchen cupboards, left, impart a three-dimensional effect. In the bathroom, above, motion sensors rule, with an automatic-flush toilet.

designer rearranges often to suit his whims. Hardly a week goes by, in fact, that something here doesn't change—two rugs switched, a new wall covering hung or maybe a prototype piece brought up from downstairs. After all, change is what Rashid is about.

So perhaps it's only for now that one seating area features the designer's orange plastic Oh chair, lime-green Orgy sofa and MP rug in abstract shapes of hot pink and fuchsia, accented by a George Kovacs floor lamp and, in one corner, a prized disc jockey table he designed in the 1990s based on his own experience. (He still spins vinyl at the occasional private event.)

Elsewhere, Rashid's undulating Omni couch in fuchsia Ultrasuede features five pieces that can be configured in different seating arrangements to accommodate up to 12. And in the kitchen, laminated cabinets in an abstract pattern of hot pink, lime green and electric blue don't quite match a steel-legged orange table and his yellow Alo chairs.

Asked about his use of all these lively hues, Rashid admits that his tastes, like his living space, are constantly evolving—there was a time when he preferred a monochromatic palette, in fact. But surely such an apostle of change is free to change his mind. □