

GREAT SPACES

Divine Inspiration

There's nothing sacrilegious about this city's appetite for loft conversions, even when the raw space is a deconsecrated church. Here, four places of worship, born again

BY ALEX BOZIKOVIC

Who: Sean Claessen, a creative director at Merge, a marketing agency, and Eva Burany, an account director at Maritz, also a marketing agency

What: A 1906 building formerly home to the Centennial Japanese United Church

Where: Bloor and Dovercourt

Claessen's first apartment was in the Argyle Lofts on Dovercourt. He loved the building, but the industrial charm of the exterior didn't extend into the generic, boxy condos within. When he heard about this old church being converted, he snagged the best of the 28 proposed units: a two-storey, 1,250-square-foot loft. Before he signed, though, he wanted to make sure the details he loved—wood beams, brick walls, stained glass windows—would be preserved by the developer. "He took me up in the rafters with a flashlight, crawling over insulation to show me which beams and walls would still be visible," he says. Claessen was convinced. He and Burany (they met shortly after his attic excursion) moved into the new place in 2009, and they both love living in a piece of Toronto's history. Their living room is at the top of what was the vaulted ceiling, and their favourite spot is just up the spiral staircase on their private deck—one of only two in the building. "You can see the steeples of nine other churches from the deck," says Claessen. "I'm fascinated by the concentration of them in the neighbourhood. Many of the church congregations have moved on, but the buildings remain."



