

## TRADE SECRETS

# He Conjures Light With a Software Wand

By DEBORAH BALDWIN

**E**VEN in 1998, when apartments sold faster than dot-com stocks, a Broome Street loft languished on the market for months before Alastair Standing, an architect who specializes in hardship cases, stumbled on it.

"People come to me with spaces other people didn't want," he said. "They ask, 'What can we do?'" The loft was a chance to practice on a space of his own so forlorn and dark that no one else wanted to try.

Protruding from the back of a former brass factory in SoHo, near Chinatown, the loft was used as a darkroom. One wall had windows, and they stared into a brick wall. The exposure, if you could call it that, was northern.

But the ceiling was high (16 feet), and the price (\$310,000) was right. And the half that stuck out like a carport gave Mr. Standing, who trained as an architect under Zaha Hadid, an idea.

He gave the space a new source of light. Lifting the lid on the exposed half, he installed a glass roof. Then he hung a mirror 6 by 10 feet under the glass, tilting it to catch the sun, even on grim days in January.

Face the mirror from the far end of the loft, and can you see a reflection of a horizonless sky, interrupted only by clouds, skittering birds and an occasional airplane. Stand directly under the mirror, which is made of one-way glass, and you see through it and the ranks of skylights to the clouds.

To polish the mirror, Mr. Standing, a practical, soft-spoken man, bought a mop on a 17-foot handle.

Mr. Standing, 44, teaches graduate design at the New Jersey Institute of Technology. He is something of a specialist in seasonal affect disorder. Born in Manchester, England, and at one time a resident of London, he moved to New York in 1985 to work for Arquitectonica, the Miami-based firm. He has had his own architectural practice since

1990, doing mainly residential work.

Mr. Standing veers toward the abstract when he talks about working in sun-starved places like Manhattan. In essence, he maps the existing light, then elaborates on it.

And it is not all done with mirrors. For clients with a brownstone on the Upper East Side, he is channeling light horizontally and vertically through new windows, skylights and floor openings. "By introducing skylights and making holes in the floors as well, I can bring light down into areas where light from windows doesn't penetrate," he said. "Wherever you get a coincidence of axes of light, horizontal or vertical, you locate something — glass stairs or a bathroom."

About 10 years ago, he began using vector-modeling software, which allows him to generate wire-frame drawings and three-dimensional maps of structures. Through a combination of that and other programs, he can study the way light falls inside a space.

To map the project in the Broome Street loft, he used Lightscape software by Autodesk, which allows designers to orient projects in time and place — right down to the precise street address, time of year and time of day. It helped him gauge what little light existed in the loft and how it might change if, say, the roof were made of glass.

The program let Mr. Standing tinker with the angle of the mirror and to predict the effect of mixing natural and artificial light, much the way a painter might mix colors. (Northern light is blue. Fluorescent light

## SILHOUETTES

In the studio of a sculptor, Phyllis Rosser, right, glass insets in the partitions and the furniture channel the light from north-facing windows.



Photographs by Scott Frances; Antoine Bootz for The New York Times (far left); Jeffrey Scales/The New York Times, (portrait)

comes in several shades, including a warm "daylight.")

At the dark end of the 1,100-square-foot loft, he directed the relatively warm light of standard tungsten-halogen bulbs up the walls. Daylight pools and refracts off a terrazzo floor under the glass roof, mingling with fluorescent light.

Long before razing the roof, Mr. Standing handed his wife, Judith Zimmer, a writer, and their son, Sam, then 7, computer-animated images of their new loft home. The loft has lived up to its virtual reality, Ms. Zimmer said, with startlingly bright light bouncing into the living area below the mirror. "I can go into the living room and feel like I'm outside," she said. "I can see stars at night."

This wasn't Mr. Standing's first rescue mission in the neighborhood. In 1995, he received a call from an artist, Phyllis Rosser, who had bought a fourth-floor studio on Crosby Street. Another former industrial space

with a high ceiling and big windows facing north, it was gasping for light in shadows cast by two buildings, 6 and 11 stories high, across a well posing as a courtyard.

Mr. Standing exploited the daylight so artfully that even when the weather is cloudy, blocks of light fan out across the floor — "a very bizarre idea when light is indirect," he conceded.

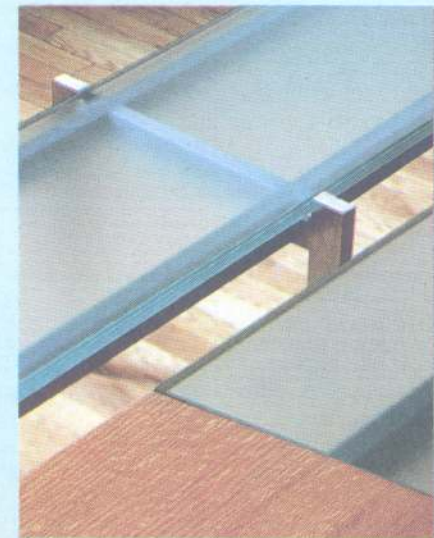
Even when the sky is cloudy-bright, shadows are cast on the floor. Mr. Standing designed the furniture, the bathroom wall and a sliding partition around the sleeping area with glass insets positioned to spill the light as far as possible. Then he painted the walls white, planted halogen spotlights in the ceiling and installed new windows and

## Specs: Light in Dark Places

**F**or Phyllis Rosser, Alastair Standing designed benches like the one at right, tables and a kitchen peninsula with triple-layered etched glass, laminated for safety. Structural glass is available to the trade only from Depp Glass in Long Island City ([www.deppglass.com](http://www.deppglass.com)). Depp also makes light-diffusing wall panels.

Mr. Standing installed Lightolier fixtures with tungsten halogen bulbs inside the window recesses of the Rosser studio. Similar fixtures, \$14 each, are available from Lighting by Gregory in Manhattan, (212) 966-1965. In his Broome Street loft, he installed Rab flood lamps, starting at \$14, from Lighting by Gregory. A mezzanine was made with 8-by-8-inch Pittsburgh Corning glass blocks, \$3.23 each from Imperia Brothers, Pelham Manor, N.Y., ([www.imperiabros.com](http://www.imperiabros.com)).

Mr. Standing's number is (212) 925-2212. **DEBORAH BALDWIN**



## VIRTUAL WINDOW

Alastair Standing, above, installed a glass roof and a mirror tilted to bring the sky down to eye level in a dark SoHo loft, left.

vertical louvers that focus, like apertures, on what little sky is visible.

Hidden inside the window recesses are tungsten-halogen bulbs, which mimic daylight when it disappears prematurely at this time of year.

The cost of Ms. Rosser's renovation, including the furniture, was about \$180,000. Despite all the glass and the steel trim, the mood is soft, partly because the wood surfaces are warm, and much of the light is indirect. "People thought, 'You're a sculptor, how can you work here?'" said Ms. Rosser, who creates pieces out of pale gray driftwood. "But I really love the feeling, I feel very comforted by it."

The Standing family loft on Broome Street has a more high-tech-in-an-old-industrial-space feel. To wring more space out of the loft, Mr. Standing erected piers and a mezzanine with floors of thin glass blocks.

He tucked fluorescent fixtures under the beds, with a warmer-than-usual light that floods the kitchen and bath areas below.

The glass blocks are frosted in places for privacy and sandwiched with a construction material that cuts down noise. So far none of the blocks have broken, and nothing dropped on them has broken either.

By serving as his own contractor, Mr. Standing completed the renovation for less than \$185,000. The couple say that the market value of the loft is at least \$800,000.

At first its white walls and spare furnishings gave the loft an architect-lives-here look, but since then, ivy planted at the foot of one brick wall has climbed nearly to the ceiling. And Ms. Zimmer has sneaked in a few ornamental plants.

"I've had a huge fig tree since August," she said on one of the bleakest days in January, "and it's still here."