

ON LOCATION



RIVER TO RIVER Mary K. Baumann, left, and her husband, Will Hopkins, gave up a grand rent-stabilized apartment in Manhattan to renovate the turbine room of a Minneapolis mill.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHELLE LITVIN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Trading New York For Midwest Grit

By MICHAEL TORTORELLO

IN the fall of 2007, Will Hopkins and Mary K. Baumann made what many New Yorkers would consider a puzzling real estate decision. Maybe a crazy one. Having sold their Chelsea office, the veteran graphic designers traded a 2,000-square-foot apartment in one of the grandest buildings on the Upper West Side,

with 13-foot ceilings and a 100-foot-long courtyard view, for a pair of unfinished basement condominiums. Oh yes, and the stabilized rent on the apartment was \$2,000 a month. And the condominiums are in Minneapolis.

The story of the couple's move to a converted flour mill on the Mississippi riverfront turns out, though, to be long on inspiration and short on regrets. Since 1976, Mr. Hopkins had lived in the Apthorp, the huge Renais-



After decades of Upper West Side splendor, life in a Minneapolis mill.

sance Revival monument to rent control that Nora Ephron eulogized in a 2006 profile in *The New Yorker*. With new owners planning to convert the building to condos, Mr. Hopkins said, "the apartment was going to sell for \$4.5 million."

Expecting an unholy war between landlord and tenants — and anticipating who would win — the couple reached an agreement to terminate their lease. Next, they embarked on what Ms. Baumann calls "a new adventure."

It was a homecoming for Ms. Baumann, 57, who grew up in suburban St. Paul. Mr. Hopkins, who spent his

childhood downriver in eastern Arkansas and concedes to being "a few years older" than his wife, first encountered the Twin Cities in 1973. A guest lecturer at the University of Minnesota, he flew in weekly to teach a magazine development class. His best student was Ms. Baumann, then a senior in the journalism school.

As their six-person shop, called Hopkins-Baumann, was shifting from an increasingly stagnant magazine market into more book projects, the couple set out to lower their overhead, in both senses of the word. At

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LIVING TOGETHER



CURRY FAMILY

SISTER ACT

Sara, left, and Julie Curry were born less than nine months apart and raised together. They are biological-ly unrelated.

So Close, Yet So Different

By SARAH KERSHAW

AS sisters only four months apart, Julie and Sara Curry grew up being peppered with questions from confused classmates. Your mom was in labor for four months? asked one friend, said Sara, 19. How is it possible? others inquired.

The Curry sisters, college sophomores who live with their parents in this high desert town on the outskirts of San Diego, are what Dr. Nancy L.

Segal, a psychologist who is researching behavioral differences among twins, refers to as virtual twins. By her definition, virtual twins are unrelated children born within nine months of each other who enter a family, through birth or adoption, in the first year of life. Since 1991, Dr. Segal has been studying 137 such sets of siblings, whose average age difference is three months.

As scientific subjects, virtual twins provide a rich pool of material for researchers tackling the nature-versus-nurture question. In Dr. Segal's stud-

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AT HOME WITH

FAYTHE LEVINE

The Ambassador of Handmade

By PENELOPE GREEN

THE entrepreneurial spirit of the modern crafts girl should not be underestimated. Faythe Levine, a 30-year-old gallerist, collector, maker and all-around booster of the indie-D.I.Y. crafts movement began six years ago with some sock monkeys and a handstitched felt owl.

Today, Ms. Levine, whose tattooed arms are twined with more hearts, flowers and lettering than a crewelwork sampler, is the proprietor of a crafts store and gallery, as well as the prime documentarian and patron saint of what she calls the handmade nation. She is cited in academic journals, quoted in magazines and newspapers, appears on TV and has been a keynote speaker at arts symposiums.

Back in 2002, however, Ms. Levine was a sometime artist who made punk rock zines. That year, she organized an art show of sock monkeys in her home, sock monkeys being universally appealing objects requiring not much medium, she explained, mostly just socks. She had 80 submissions, most of which sold.

The next year, she began making stuffed felt owls and selling them online; the success of the business — she had orders for 200 at a time — wreaked havoc on her neck and back. Before long, she found herself knee-deep in the alt-

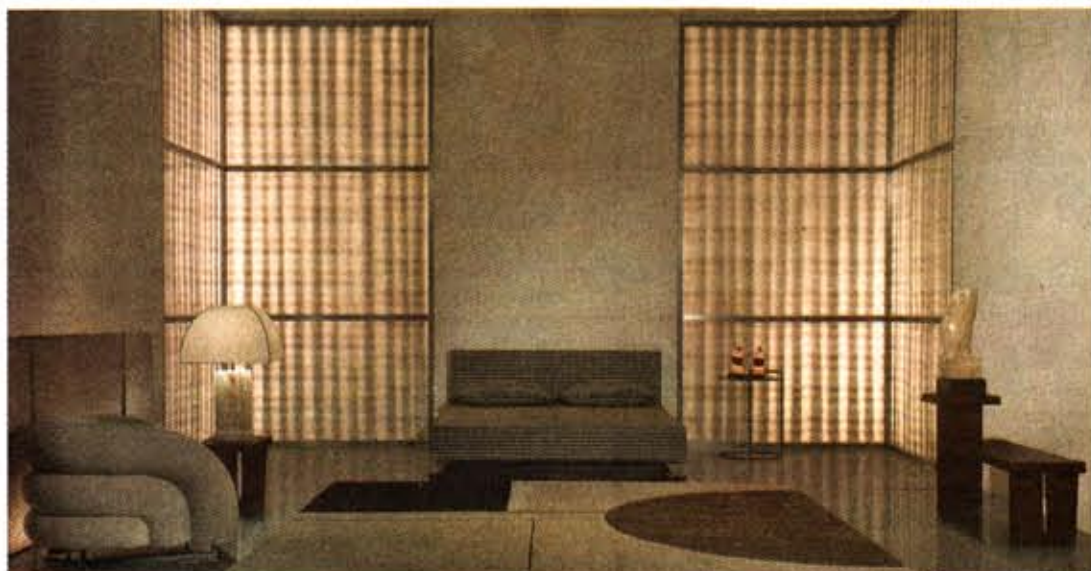
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DARREN HAUCK FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

PATCHWORK LAB

Faythe Levine, a pillar of the do-it-yourself movement, at her home in Milwaukee. She recently completed a documentary and a book, both with the title "Handmade Nation."



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1. The plaza outside the Hopkins-Baumann condo in Minneapolis's Standard Mill, right, faces the river.

2. The Valcucine kitchen's hoods make a sleek off-rhyme with exposed beams, columns and PVC piping.

3. A pivot door has a one and a zero, for "in" and "out"; the couple, graphic designers, chose the font, Futura.

4. Newly cut windows and a Fabbian Teorema lamp brighten the concrete bedroom, a.k.a. the Bunker.

9.

5. Geoffrey Warner, the architect, attached casters to a pair of Room & Board tables and laid a floor track that stretches from dining room to office.

6. Scott McGlasson, a designer and craftsman specializing in wood, built the vanity, the mirror (based on Mr. Warner's design) and other pieces.

7. The couple knocked out a wall to

combine two units, but other barriers weren't budging. This wall, a patchwork of limestone, brick and concrete block, harbors knickknacks in its crevices.

8. The condo is half underground, but design tricks help banish the darkness. A platform lifts the media room up to the windows, while the undulating white ceilings — or "clouds" — reduce shadows overhead.

9. Renovation has not polished away the industrial past. Photos from the couple's collection hang in front of a bricked-up turbine shaft, and river water still flows through a sluiceway under the floor.

10. The couple, who run their business from home, use the Little House — a room within a room — as both conference area and guest suite.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHELLE LITVIN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Trading New York for Midwest Grit

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the start of 2007, they paid \$550,000 for two below-grade units that together had been the turbine room of the old Standard Mill and knocked out the dividing wall. Other parts of the building had been converted to a hotel at one time, but this basement space was still a 2,600-square-foot jumble of massive wood beams, four-foot-thick walls, mechanical units and pipes. Within this cluttered grotto, the couple hoped to fit an office, a guest suite, a kitchen, a media room and a professional library. Their starting budget was \$200,000; their finishing budget, twice that.

Geoffrey Warner, the founder and principal of Alchemy Architects in St. Paul, had never built out a condo. But as the creator of the weeHouse, a modular prefab home that starts as small as 341 square feet, Mr. Warner has a knack for cramming big plans into tight spaces. His approach here often proved to be counterintuitive, turning the turbine room's subterranean site and industrial aesthetic to unexpected advantage.

"What did we do to make it seem like there's more light?" Mr. Warner said with a laugh. "Reduce the ceiling height!" Specifically, he minimized the dark recesses above the windows by fashioning "clouds" — white, wavy drywall forms that

slope up from the window tops to the 10-and-a-half-foot ceiling. To bridge the gap between work and domestic spaces, he bolted casters to a pair of tables and set them on a 50-foot track. One minute the tables are set for dining, the next they're coasting into the office.

Sometimes Mr. Warner's marching orders could seem contradictory. For instance, his clients wanted him both to preserve the rough limestone walls and find a way to hang their store of photography. It's a personal collection, gathered directly from the artists — photographers like Elliott Erwitt, Suzie Fitzhugh and John Loengard — who shot for the couple's magazines. Mr. Hopkins was the last art director of the original *Look*; Ms. Baumann was an art director at *Life* and overhauled magazines like *People* and *Money*.

Mr. Warner built a backdrop for some of the photographs by piling rough-sawn timbers into what he terms a Jenga stack — a room-within-a-room that Ms. Baumann, who has a knack for branding, calls the Little House. Inside are a fold-out Ligne Roset sofa for guests and a three-foot-by-six-foot bathroom.

There may be a novelty quality to elements like the floor track or the pivot door to the bedroom; the couple affectionately call them "follies." But Ms. Baumann, whose professional talents in-

clude historical image research, dug up archival photos that uncannily presage Mr. Warner's designs. A steel conveyor track can be seen running the length of the basement floor in the original 1879 mill. And a primitive plank crib — a sort of indoor shed — squats close to where the Little House now stands. Mr. Warner, who didn't see the stills until the condo was nearly finished, said, "I must have been working intuitively the whole time."

Mr. Hopkins and Ms. Baumann generally trusted their architect's hunches, but at times they inserted themselves more insistently into the planning. Mr. Hopkins, for instance, tagged along with Mr. Warner on a trip to a surplus store to ensure that the right rope was picked for a lamp pulley. The couple used to "run away with the circus each January," Ms. Baumann explained, mixing with performers at the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey winter headquarters in Florida in preparation for designing the circus's programs. During these visits, Mr. Hopkins developed strong opinions about how rope should lie in the hand.

They were similarly deliberate in their choice of the Mill District neighborhood itself, on the edge of the city's downtown, where a new cultural corridor has replaced brownfields and ruins over the last decade. Jean Nouvel's Guthrie Theater lies just a block west of their building, and a Cor-Ten-

clad music school by James Dayton, a Frank Gehry acolyte, is across the street. A few doors away, at the Mill City Museum, a farmers' market pops up each Saturday on a waterfront lot. At the market, the couple runs into new friends like Maren Kloppmann, a ceramicist whose work they had collected back in New York.

In fact, Mr. Hopkins and Ms. Baumann seem to be quickly assembling a social circle from the city's creative community to go with their collections of pottery, handmade brushes and rustic brooms. Mr. Hopkins, who makes his own twig furniture, now shares space with one of Mr. Warner's friends, Scott McGlasson, in a St. Paul warehouse. Woodspout, Mr. McGlasson's company, made the couple's bed, dressers, vanity, media table and sideboard, along with numerous built-ins.

"In New York, you say hi to your neighbor, but it wasn't the same sense of camaraderie," Ms. Baumann said. Asked what they miss about their old lives in New York, the couple pause. Surely not the costs, they say. With the proceeds from the sale of their office, and some savings, they own their new home outright.

"Our friends," Ms. Baumann said. "I miss our specific doctors. I miss the mass transit."

"The olive oil," Mr. Hopkins added.

"That's not much," Ms. Baumann said.