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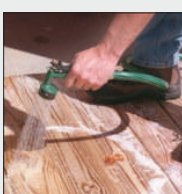
A WEEK'S WORTH OF HELPFUL HINTS

Spring is time for deck maintenance



1
Scrub the surface. Use a stiff bristle brush to remove flaking stain or dirt. Don't use metal-bristle brushes on cedar or redwood or you may scar the wood.

2
Apply the cleaner. Use a deck brightening and cleaning product to cleanse the deck. Work it into the wood with a stiff brush. Make sure plants or ponds underneath are covered with tarps.



3
Power wash the deck. Use a pressure washer with a fan spray nozzle on a lower setting to remove the brightener solution and other residue. Let the deck dry thoroughly.

4
Inspect the condition of the wood. Replace rotten or damaged wood, pound in popped nails or replace with screws, check tightness of fasteners on railings, supports and stairs.

5
Pick the finish you want. Opaque stains have good color coverage, but require more frequent reapplication. Semi-transparent stains last longer. Clear sealers or wood preservatives are good for pretty wood.

6
Spray on the sealer. Use a hand-pumped sprayer for larger areas or apply with a roller and brush. Use a roller on decking after spraying to force finish into the wood and spread out any puddles.

7
Use a brush on the end grain. Work the finish deeply into the ends of boards, seams and gaps between boards. End grain may need more than one coat.

Source: Home Depot's "Decks 1-2-3," Meredith, \$24.95

LOFTS

Wide-open spaces high on convenience



RENEE HANNANS HENRY / Staff

By ALMA E. HILL
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As Atlanta's population tops the 5 million mark and daily commuters get more grueling, metro area residents are finding a way to slow down and connect with each other by living in lofts — both the authentic kind in old downtown factories and in the new style suburban loft, built to look like an older building.

These days, developers are building lofts with more amenities than oversized windows and open living spaces. And the dwellings often are built near restaurants, shops and small businesses so once you're home, you can hang up the car keys.

"What you're finding in Roswell and Marietta and Woodstock is a village," says Beth Haynes, co-chairwoman of the Atlanta Downtown Festival and Tour, which is hosting a tour of lofts May 19-20.

"It's that sense that most of what I need is right here, and I can walk to it and know the shop owners and restaurateurs. The concept works whether you're downtown, in a redeveloping small town with a business district or in a newly built, planned community," she explains. "It's that feeling that you're part of a small community in a city of 5 million."

Although lofts attract more singles, couples and empty nesters than families with school-age children, the low-maintenance lifestyle and proximity to other attractions are common bonds.

"There's no question that's what people are asking for," says Lew Oliver, a residential and urban designer with Whole Town Solutions who has worked on loft developments throughout the metro area.

"We're going to see a lot more of this as gas prices climb and traffic gets worse," he says. "And there's a whole generation of entrepreneurs who

► Please see LOFT, HS7

Kurt Clemmons in his loft in Chamblee. His two-bedroom, two-bath unit has ceilings that are 20 feet high.

AN URBAN STATE OF MIND, WHETHER INTOWN OR OUT

Walt Bilinski (right) and his partner, Steve MacNeil, live in a downtown Atlanta loft just steps away from businesses they own. HS6



FRANK NIEMEIR / Staff



JAMES KLOTZ Photography

Decorating a loft is a special skill, says interior designer Michael Habachy. The bedroom flows into the living room in his downtown loft. HS7

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LOFTS: AN URBAN STATE OF MIND

By ALMA E. HILL
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No Mas! Productions is as much of a business as it is a lifestyle for owners Walt Bilinski and Steve MacNeil. Like a small but growing number of Atlanta area residents, they live, work, shop and dine all in the same block. There is the quintessential loft life.

Their 4,000-square-foot loft in Castleberry Hill is a doorstep away from their 15,000-square-foot furniture and accessories store, which is just steps away from their two-story cantina. The restaurant, which seats 350, sells everything from enchiladas to Day of the Dead statues.

"They can't take home the 50-foot-long bar," laughs MacNeil, "but we can do one customized for their house."

When the partners set their sights on the loft back in 1998, they were just looking for a cool place to live so they could end their commute.

"We came from Alpharetta," explains MacNeil. "I was driving some days an hour and a half each way to work. So I got three hours back into my days."

Once they settled in, they bought four more lofts on their block. They later sold some and used the equity to open a warehouse to store merchandise for their No Mas! furniture store on Huff Road.

The cantina opened last August. In November, Bilinski and MacNeil turned the warehouse into a retail store featuring one-of-a-kind bed frames, sculptures, paintings, doors and accent pieces created by more than 350 Mexican artisans.

"We feel the timing was right," says Bilinski. "When we opened on Huff Road 12 years ago, this is how Castleberry Hill feels now. So we feel like we're pioneers."

The men admit they aren't ready to close their flagship store just yet, because some of their clientele won't venture downtown to shop.

"People are a little afraid of downtown, period. And the southern side of downtown, they think, is scary," explains MacNeil. "But it's definitely on the upswing. We're past the tipping point."

The investment is paying off.

MacNeil doesn't own a car anymore, and Bilinski's 10-year-old Beemer stays parked for days, a convenience many people can only dream of. "We can go a week and not drive the car," says MacNeil.

But although they are enjoying an unburied life while they watch their businesses grow, there is one drawback, MacNeil says, to living next door to work. "It's knowing when to shut off the computer."



Photos by FRANK NIEMEIR / Staff

THE LOFT

Tired of the daily commute, Walt Bilinski and Steve MacNeil moved from Alpharetta to this 4,000-square-foot loft in Castleberry Hill.

THIS IS THE LIFE



THE RESTAURANT

Last August, the couple opened the 350-seat No Mas! Cantina a few steps away from their loft.



THE SHOP

Also near the loft is No Mas! Hacienda, a retail store featuring one-of-a-kind bed frames, sculptures, paintings, doors and accent pieces created by more than 350 Mexican artisans.



Log on to ajc.com/homestyle for a photo gallery on the lofts, plus the nearby restaurant and retail store.

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