

SAN DIEGO HOME/GARDEN

L I F E S T Y L E S ®



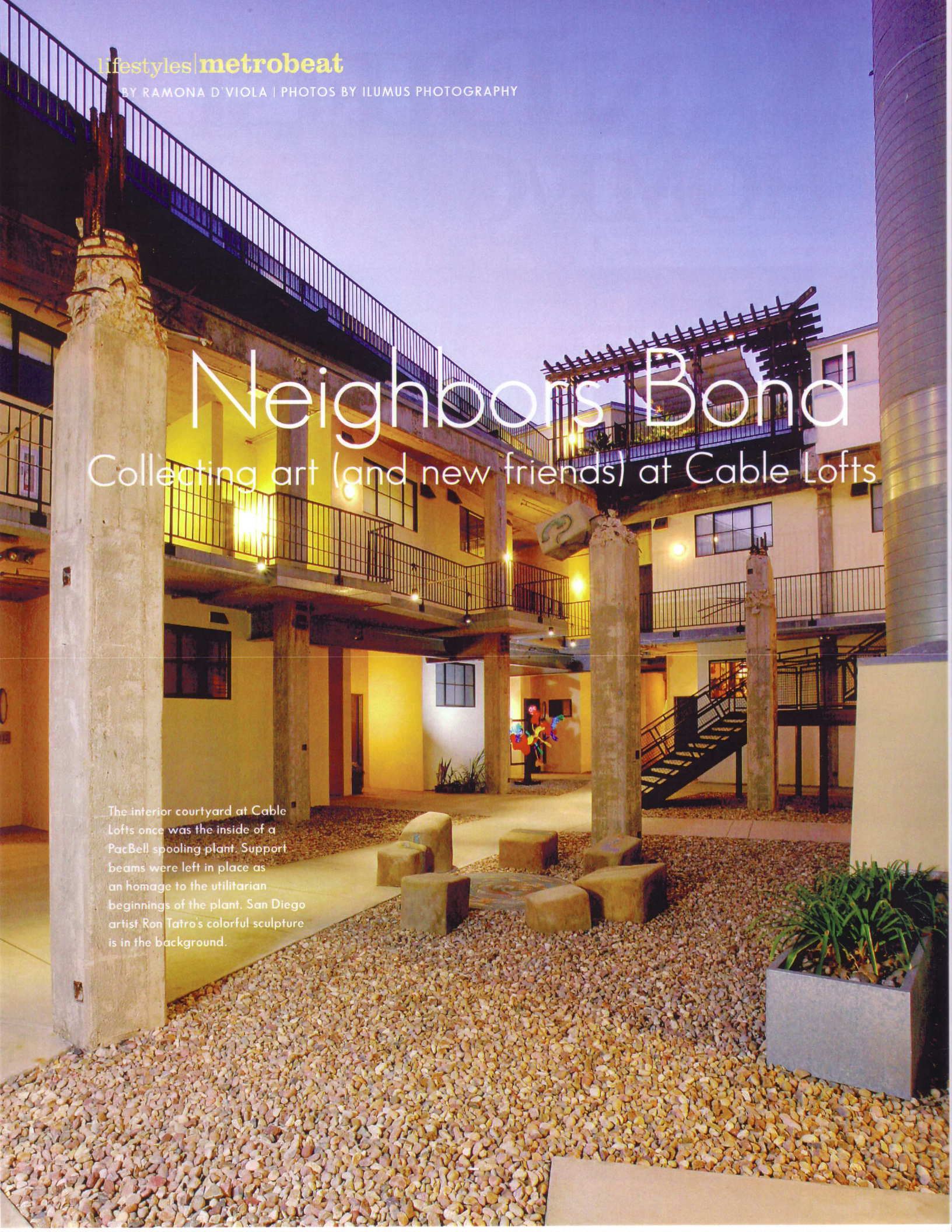
lifestyles|metrobeat

BY RAMONA D'VIOLA | PHOTOS BY ILUMUS PHOTOGRAPHY

Neighbors Bond

Collecting art (and new friends) at Cable Lofts

The interior courtyard at Cable Lofts once was the inside of a PacBell spooling plant. Support beams were left in place as an homage to the utilitarian beginnings of the plant. San Diego artist Ron Tatro's colorful sculpture is in the background.



"Nothing makes you more tolerant of a neighbor's noisy party than being there."

— Franklin P. Jones

METAMORPHOSIS

Just off the steady pulse of University Avenue, the Cable Lofts building is camouflaged by Hillcrest's sporadically wooded landscape, and a cluster of aging apartment buildings. Once an austere PacBell spooling plant, the canyon-side building was a sturdy, well-built structure — one worthy of metamorphosis as new millennium housing.

After a fitful and protracted gestation, the old Telco building emerged from its scaffolding-encased chrysalis the archetype of a modern urban habitat. Long awaited, the condo conversion had a near instant waiting list of buyers. "The property agent told me it had just sold," says resident Dan Stephen of the model unit he viewed. "So, I wrote a check, slipped it in her purse, and left. Two weeks later, she called. The unit had fallen out of escrow and did I still want it?" A shy smile sneaks across Stephen's face. "I know what I like."

A retired banker and naval officer, Stephen is also a board member at Balboa Park's San Diego Museum of Art, and not surprisingly, an avid art collector. Among his impressive collection of masterworks are canvases by neo-modernist John Joseph Enneking, etchings by Richard Diebenkorn, and lithographs of Wayne Thiebaud's urban landscapes. "It was perfect for my collection," adds Stephen. "I only wanted this unit."

ACCIDENTALLY ON PURPOSE

There's a maxim familiar to all members of the military: Never volunteer for anything. Alas, no dictum exists for when someone else volunteers your services for you. "My neighbor



Dan Stephen (left) in his loft with neighbor Henry Parke and Sydney.

thought I would be a good candidate to head up an arts acquisition committee," says Stephen. "During one of our homeowner's association meetings, we were airing the usual complaints when Henry (Parke, his neighbor) volunteers

me to lead an art committee."

Besides being an officer and a gentleman, the loft's resident, and foremost, collector had access to world-class collections and artists. His skills would serve the group well. "There was an



Internationally renowned artist Ante Marinovic's original installation commissioned by developer Jeremy Cohen. In background is a new acquisition by artist Ron Tatro.

overwhelming interest in acquiring art for the lofts. Even the developer wanted us to build upon the original installations," he adds. "I was happy to do it."

CONTINUUM

A far cry from the crash pad, live/work studios of the early 20th century, the Cable Lofts set the bar for adaptive reuse in the 21st. When S.D. Malkin Properties developer Jeremy Cohen embarked upon the renovation project, he envisioned a place where art and artists were very much in the foreground. "We designed the building to act as a backdrop for art," says Cohen. "We intentionally left spaces for the residents to add their own."

Cohen commissioned prominent

local architect/artist Jennifer Luce to design the loft's entrance way. The building's unadorned brick façade was transformed by an asymmetrical industrial gateway made of welded heavy metal and wire mesh. A multi-faceted, monochromatic olive-green sculptural wall runs the length of the commons area. Each plane of the angular abutments reflects light differently — each creates a palette of colors from one. This seamless blending of industry, art and architecture is Luce's trademark.

Hewn from what once were the bowels of the building, the Cable Lofts' interior courtyard resembles an oversized Zen garden. Clamshell-sized stones add texture to a palette of muted colors and smooth surfaces.

Columns, which once supported the building's roof and interior structure, were left partially intact as a nod to the building's industrial ethos. Using the rebar-crowned columns as his muse, artist Ante Marinovic's mixed-media sculpture pays homage to the beginnings of telecommunications.

Cohen says he's "thrilled and delighted" to see this continuum taking hold. "It is exactly what we envisioned from the project's inception."

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Aside from all the other warm and fuzzy benefits of getting to know thy neighbor, Stephen and his band of art buyers raised more than enough money to acquire their first collective piece — a brightly colored sculpture, reminiscent of Calder's stabiles, created by San Diego artist Ron Tatro.

For the past 10 years, Marinovic's was the sole piece installed in the courtyard. With the addition of Tatro's sculpture, the collection has doubled. And although the large majority of tenants at the Lofts are enthusiastic about creating the communal art collection, there are those not satisfied with the process, or with the artwork selected. To some, Tatro's brightly colored sculpture piece is at stark contrast to the serene feeling of the stone-filled atrium.

THE CABLE THAT BINDS

After several months of planning the ad-hoc group of art acquisitionists announced plans to throw a private bash in their decidedly hip homestead. The invite list included artists, bohemians, tenants' friends and family who received a formal, handcrafted invitation made by one of the committee members. "Our resident artists opened their studios for the evening and held mini-receptions," says Stephen. "We visited each other's spaces, broke bread and got to know each other. It was simply incredible. After that evening we began seeing each other as friends, not just people living in the same building. We became a community."