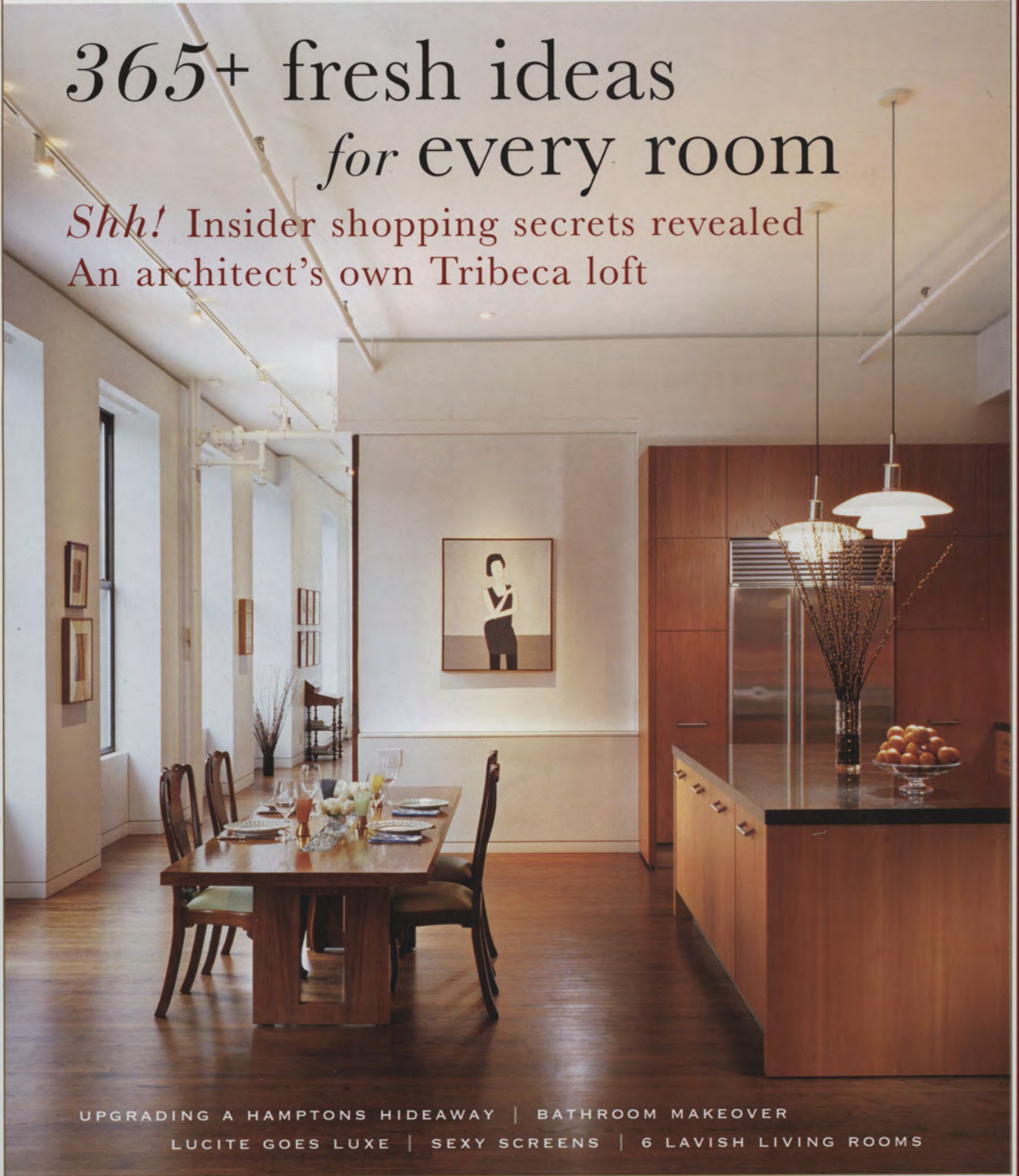


# NEW YORK SPACES

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## If the shoe fits

An assortment of lilliputian footwear started out as a headache—  
and became a triumph



“THOSE TINY HORRORS!”

That was designer Clodagh’s first thought when she entered Georganne Heller’s 3,000-square-foot loft in the West Village and was confronted with more than 250 small shoes. The Irish film and theater producer had assembled the collection over 30 years; now she needed Clodagh’s help to put them on proper display.

“When I went to see her, there were these tiny shoes everywhere—on tables, in baskets, in boxes—and my design is very minimalist and tidy,” Clodagh recalls. “I said to her, ‘What the hell are these?’ But once I got over my first impression, the whole thing started to amuse me, and I decided to treat it like an art project.”

Inspired by famed American sculptor Louise Nevelson, Clodagh created a large collage display. “I took

all of the shoes and laid them out on the floor of my studio, arranging and rearranging them until they formed a pleasing shape,” she explains.

Then Clodagh had her carpenter craft a display case using stained birch wood. Each shelf is sized to a specific shoe, and the total project measures 12 feet by 4 feet. “We wanted to create a real signature art piece for the client’s loft, and it works on two levels,” notes Clodagh. “First, it’s an imposing piece of art, and second, you realize it’s actually a collection.”

Heller didn’t set out to amass shoes. “I originally started picking up one or two as my husband and I traveled,” she notes. “But over the years, I gradually stopped because friends started buying them for me.”

Heller says the group is “quite valuable,” but she can’t put a price tag

on it. At one time, the Bata Shoe Museum in Toronto, expressed interest in showcasing her assemblage, but she declined. “I know that I never spent more than \$25 for a piece, but since most of them were given to me by dear friends, the collection is really priceless to me.”

Some pieces are ceramic or glass, while others are more whimsical: Take the shoe that’s actually a paper clip or the one that’s a pincushion. There are small-scale display shoe models once used by traveling salesmen, and befitting someone in the entertainment industry, Heller has Elliot Gould’s childhood slippers and Ginger Rogers’ dancing shoes. Then there’s a sentimental favorite: her granddaughter’s first ballet slippers.

The most valuable piece, a tiny rubber shoe from the late 1800s, came from Heller’s husband. “It’s about the size of your thumb,” she points out. “But what is really special about this is that there is a small note in the shoe written by a child. It reads, ‘From Mama to Ruth, when 10 years old... Mississippi, 1910.’”

The shoes and their display case have become a signature of Heller’s loft. “Everyone stops and looks at my shoes,” she notes. “Before, the things were all over the place, but the beauty of Clodagh’s design is her sense of feng shui. Now I have my collection, but it doesn’t clutter things up.”

For the designer, creating the display was just as rewarding. “I must confess that I enjoyed the process,” says Clodagh, “once I got over the horror of all those tiny shoes!” □