

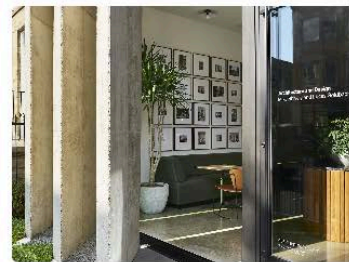
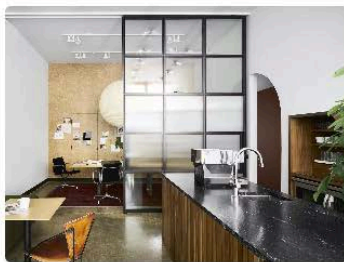


This Chicago Architect's Vision for a Buzzy Live/Work Space Started With a Café

The rest of Mike Shively's Brutalist-inspired plan includes his firm's office, an Airbnb rental, and he and his partner's luminous residence on the top floor.

Text by

Elizabeth Sweet



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Architect Mike Shively doesn't have to travel far for his first cup of coffee; the buzz of an espresso grinder and convivial coffee-shop atmosphere are mere steps away from where he sleeps.

The founder of Chicago architecture firm En Masse wakes around 7 a.m. in his glass-wrapped apartment, enjoys breakfast on its west-facing roof deck, gets dressed, and descends three floors. He heads past his Airbnb rental on the third level and his firm's office on the second to arrive at the ground-floor café, where he whips up his morning cortado with equal parts espresso and steamed milk.



On the ground floor of Mike Shively's office and residence in Chicago is a café outfitted with polished concrete floors, quartzite counters, and a ribbed walnut bar. A polished-chrome espresso machine, La Marrazzo's Linea Mini, sits poised for use on the leathered stone surface. Custom glass and iron doors, made locally, conceal a conference area.

Photo credit: Ryan McDonald / Stylist: Kimberly Swedelius

After it's poured, he takes a seat on the café's custom banquette and drinks it all in. Initially designed for the public, the sleek space ended up serving only the firm and its clients during Covid and never officially opened. "It's wonderful that it didn't," Mike says resoundingly. "Now I get my own little toy coffee shop to play with."

That the space is private panned out, but Mike, a self-proclaimed coffee addict, had been craving something similar long before the pandemic set in: a live/work solution to better support his busy day-to-day.

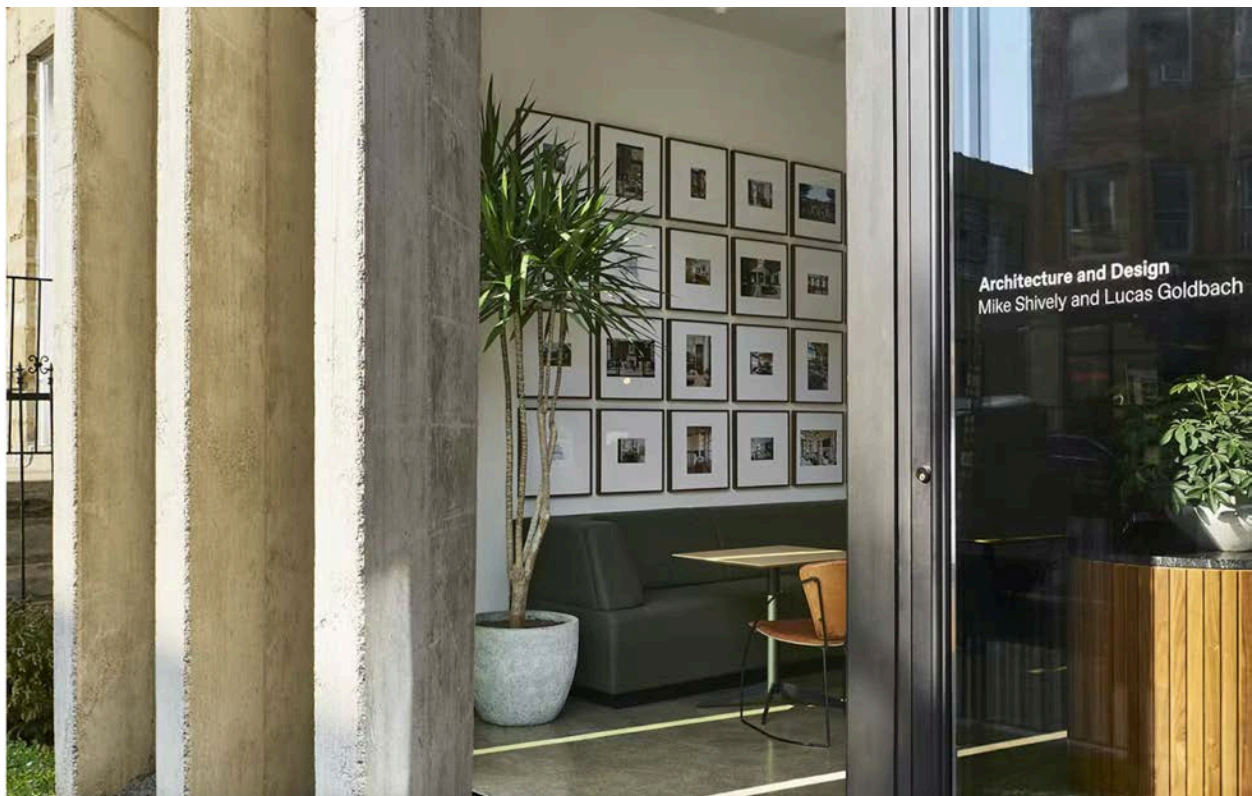
"It's something that's been rolling around forever, this concept of everything I'm interested in under one roof," he says. "There came a point in my life, especially as I started the firm, that running around all the time just wasn't making sense." The firm's formerly downtown offices were cramped and didn't get much natural light; it just wasn't optimal for growth. To fully realize the "en masse" lifestyle, as Mike calls it, he started reviewing properties, envisioning a multistory building with space for his offices and a residence.



"Clients come in and we make them coffee," Mike says. "We use it as an opportunity to slow the pace, to chit chat, and catch up on how their day has been. It takes the formality out of meetings and makes it social." Instead of a stuffy office atmosphere, "we're just in a coffee shop catching up," he says.

Photo credit: Ryan McDonald / Stylist: Kimberly Swedelius

After an exhaustive search, his interest was piqued by an overlooked slice of encroached land (a slim 21 feet wide) nestled between three-story buildings along California Avenue in Chicago's Logan Square neighborhood. The property was close to home for many En Masse team members and the area was welcoming with a slow-paced feel. Another draw, the lot's width allowed Mike to build a fourth level. "It's unique to find a property like this in Chicago, where you have the opportunity to create a glass box without being blocked by someone else."



From inside, the Brutalist-inspired facade's fins create an elegant display of light. "The fins don't necessarily bounce the light into the building, but they themselves glow in the afternoon as the sun comes around that way," Mike says. "It's a really interesting sculptural thing to appreciate from inside the space."

Photo credit: Ryan McDonald / Stylist: Kimberly Swedelius

Things looked promising from the start, but after Mike experienced the property's jaw-dropping views firsthand, he realized it was even better than he could have imagined. "I had to borrow my brother's drone and fly it to the height of where my house would be to make sure that I could get the full panorama of the city," he says.

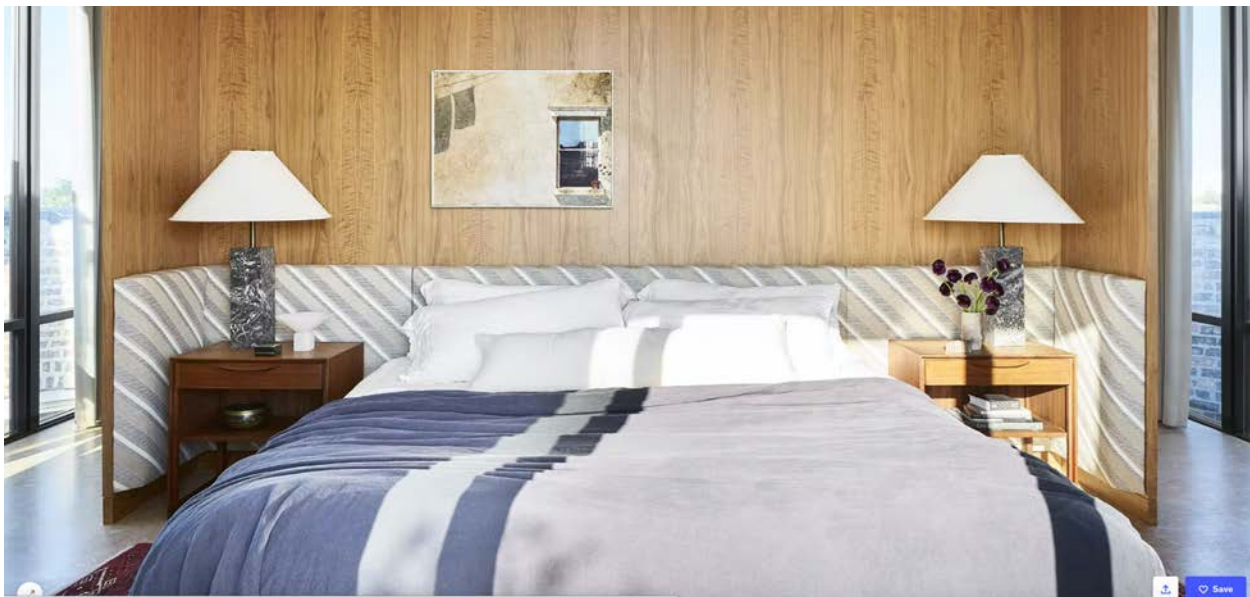


Chicago's climate required considered temperature management for Mike's top-floor residence. "We made the floors, which are cork, radiant," he explains, which keep his feet warm even on the coldest day. In summer months, air conditioning is powered by a high-velocity SpacePak system.

Photo credit: Ryan McDonald / Stylist: Kimberly Swedelius

Now that the building is complete, Mike and his partner, Bryce Sprosty, a digital product manager for a healthcare company, wake up each day to the dramatic skyline vistas Mike so carefully curated. "We can see all the way from the Willis tower to the Hancock," he explains. Off their bedroom is the deck—his breakfast spot—that includes a hammock and plants.

The residence is encased in floor-to-ceiling glass with a central core in naturally finished walnut. The couple's headboard, upholstered in a fabric from Metaphores, nests into one side, and around the corner is a galley kitchen, ideal for a quick glass of water and daily meal prep. More custom walnut cabinetry conceals appliances and storage. The space is clean-lined, complete with Waterworks backsplash tile and a stainless steel work top.



For privacy, automatic roller sun shades and custom blackout curtains were installed. "They're on a timer," Mike explains, "so throughout the day they move and adjust to the sun." Vintage side tables add character to the sleek interior. "If the house is going to be so architectural, everything in it needs to be special. I have a lot of vintage things," Mike says.

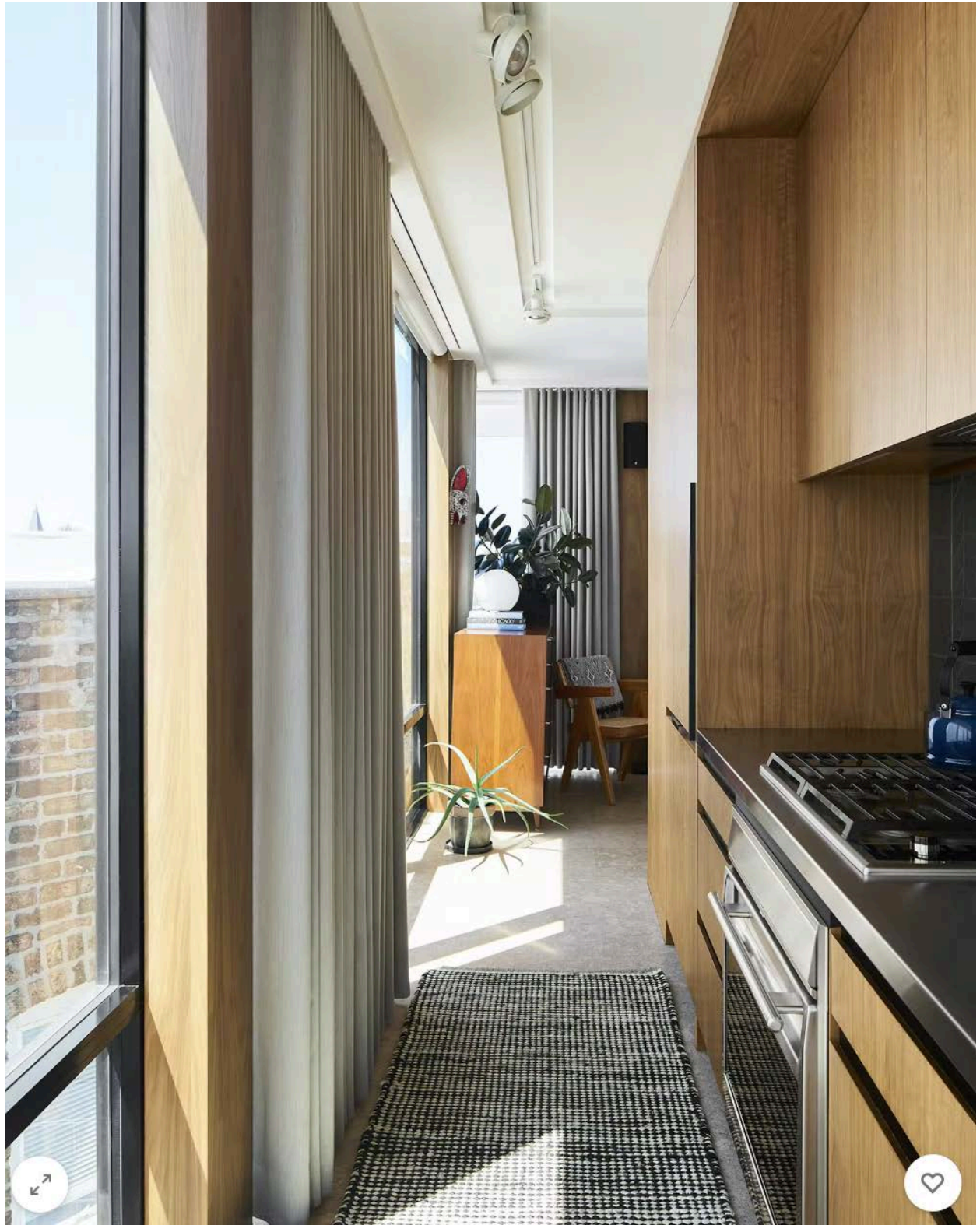
Photo credit: Ryan McDonald / Stylist: Kimberly Swedelius

Inside the core is the couple's bathroom, which features a shower with luxe Waterworks and Ann Sacks tile, a striking terrazzo floor, and a vented skylight, which, when open, gives the feeling of showering outdoors. Adjacent is more walnut cabinetry, where "everything has its place," Mike says.



Terrazzo floors and a shower skylight add visual interest. The sleek shower heads and fittings are by Waterworks.

Photo credit: Ryan McDonald / Stylist: Kimberly Swedelius



Custom walnut cabinetry conceals appliances from view in the couple's galley kitchen. Stainless steel countertops are welded in with the sink. The oven and cooktop are by Wolf, and the integrated refrigerator is Bosch.

Photo credit: Ryan McDonald / Stylist: Kimberly Swedelius

"It's something that's been rolling around forever, this concept of everything I'm interested in under one roof."

—Mike Shively, architect and resident



An open-air roof deck with a black sunshade makes for ideal lunch and coffee hangouts for En Masse team members.

Photo credit: Ryan McDonald / Stylist: Kimberly Swedelius

Mike and Bryce's commute to the café takes them past a communal roof deck off the second floor office space. "It's where I get my workday started," says Mike. "Often, as I'm coming down, some of my team are already there." Indoors, a pod of desks at the center of the office facilitates collaboration. Massive cork boards provide a place for the group to keep tabs on projects.

The firm's sample library features a storage island topped with the same quartzite chosen for the café. Drawers and custom white oak cabinetry house samples of "all the fun stuff," Mike says.



Mike used two paint colors interchangeably throughout the building. "We like a Benjamin Moore color called Silver Satin. That's what you see on all the light surfaces on the buildings," he says. "All the dark surfaces are Benjamin Moore Onyx, which is a really wonderful black with some nice undertones to it."

Photo credit: Ryan McDonald / Stylist: Kimberly Swedelius



Waterfall quartzite countertops envelop a storage island for samples. "We're big on reducing visual clutter," he notes. "Most sample libraries, it's a lot of stuff. So we went out of our way to make sure everything was concealed behind white oak doors. It keeps it all hidden."

Photo credit: Ryan McDonald / Stylist: Kimberly Swedelius

The office's finishes are a shade darker than the residence above and the café below, which is all by design. "On the second floor, we wanted it to feel very personal like we're all in it together," say Mike. "The black compresses that space, making it more intimate."

On the same level, a mudroom houses the group's coats, shoes, and hard hats. An adjacent kitchenette for employees repeats the same statement-making terrazzo used in Mike's primary bathroom.

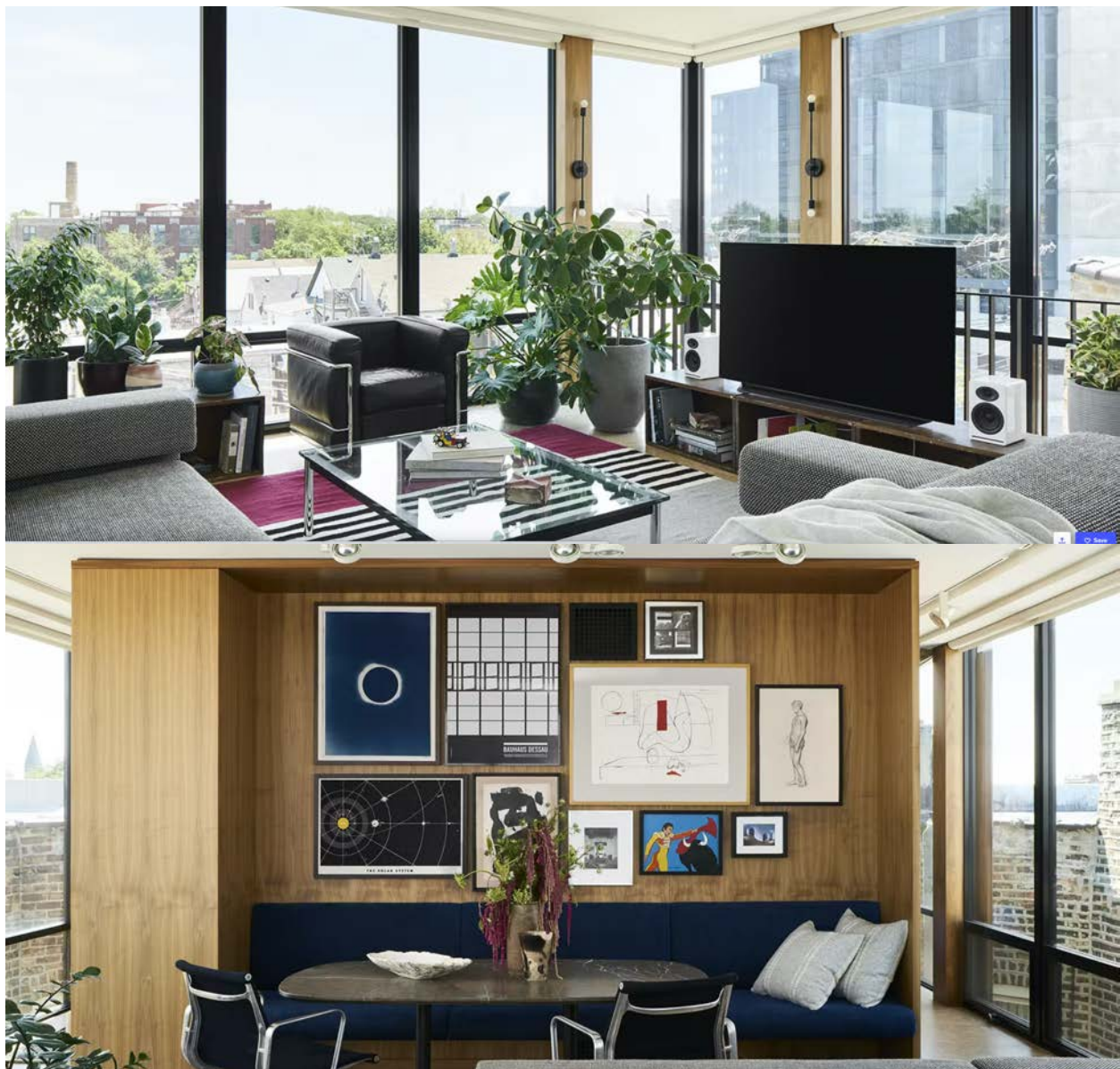




Mike and Bryce planted dripping Algerian ivy to hang suspended against the raw concrete for a touch of greenery. "I always had a vision of growing plants on the facade," he says, and Bryce is an avid gardener. "This is a collaboration, keeping the plants alive."

Photo credit: Ryan McDonald / Stylist: Kimberly Swedelius

In the evenings, after a long day, the Mike and Bryce head back to their "glass box" on the roof and unwind in their live/work space, as it provides the best view. "This room is all about orienting toward that southeast view toward downtown, so I did a corner sectional there that makes the most of it," Mike says.



A velvet cobalt blue banquette adds a jolt of vibrant color. It coordinates with accents in the gallery wall above, and contrasts with Chicago brickwork outside. The high-performance upholstery is by Maharam.

Photo credit: Ryan McDonald / Stylist: Kimberly Swedellius

Instead of winding down or streaming a show, Mike prefers to work in the evenings, so he positioned a table for dining and working to face the expansive windows. "We're big into games, too," Mike notes, "so we frequently have friends over to play there."

Integrating his residence, office, and passions under one roof has provided Mike with a more centered lifestyle, he says. Plus, the building feels "very comfortable by virtue of the fact that I live here." But that his team shows up to the office in a post-pandemic climate says a lot about what he's created.

"The reality of people not wanting to come to the office—we don't have any of that here, and I think the space encourages people to show up," Mike says. "We are a tight family."

Mike Shively Home & Studio



ARCHITECT En Masse
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