

Dallas man's Exposition Park townhome marries offbeat, original

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Special Contributor

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Most people mold a room from the ground up. Not Ken Maxwell.

Maxwell, the creative director for the Dallas office of Weber Shandwick, a public relations firm, designed his Exposition Park townhome around a single piece of art that soars more than a dozen feet in the air.

"I used this painting as the root for the entire house," he says of "Hello Japan," a massive, wildly colorful abstract canvas by Deep Ellum native Ricardo Paniagua. "In art, I see something that the normal person wouldn't be able to work with. I like pieces that have a grungy, gritty, urban look and to put them in a luxurious setting."

"Hello Japan," as well as dozens of other works dotting the 3,000-square-foot loft's walls, certainly has a life of luxury.

Maxwell's four-story townhome is a pristine canvas of pedigree furniture and well-heeled accessories with an occasional funky find. It's no surprise that during Super Bowl weekend the well-groomed space was rented for \$5,000 a night, to a German billionaire in town for P. Diddy's Fair Park party.

Maxwell purchased the three-bedroom space, which was built by Dallas architect Ron Wommack, in 2005. It had been empty for several years post-construction.

Exposition Park lies between the east end of Deep Ellum and the Exposition Avenue entrance to Fair Park. Maxwell, a former Park Cities resident, says he was nervous about the transitioning neighborhood at first, but quickly learned to love the two-minute commute to work and heavy concentration of creative types that includes artists, designers and professors.

"Exposition Park is like Marfa," Maxwell says. "The location is strange and offbeat. There are living, working artists in large open spaces, plus it's quiet and peaceful. When people do come, they are amazed. And when people move in, they rarely leave."

An avid entertainer, he also fell for the loft's open layout and fifth-floor lookout that has become famous for its annual Fourth of July fete with unparalleled views.

"This house is perfect for entertaining," says Maxwell, who shares the space with his border collie, Oswald, and cats Rocco and Ray. The kitchen, a long and narrow 25 feet by 6 feet, "transforms into a great bar during parties."

The kitchen's tiny footprint aside (he says he was surprised to find out Wommack cooks after jokingly inquiring at a social event), Maxwell says the home's design is utter perfection, especially for displaying art.

In the dining area hangs "Kong," a "photostration" by Los Angeles artist Kyle Dreher that mashes a photo and illustration to create surreal artscape featuring the famous fictitious monster. After eyeing Alfredo Salazar-Caro's work at a local show, Maxwell commissioned the Dallas artist to create "400 Guns," an installation of tiny white ceramic pistols organically hung in his fourth-floor stairwell.

Maxwell says he personally knows the artists of most of the artwork in his home.

But his favorite area at home isn't anchored by art. It's the intimate master bedroom retreat that's outfitted with a casually dressed king bed, Crate & Barrel charcoal sofa and lofty bathroom with 25-foot ceilings.

"This is the space where I spend most of my time," he says. "All 400 square feet of it."

The warmly decorated room is a far departure from the aesthetic Maxwell originally intended.

"The thing about Ron's work is that everything is perfect in the house," he says of the architect. "The construction is so solid; it's built like commercial, from the concrete walls to the retail window panels. I loved the clean space so much that when I first moved in, I thought of going stark."

But the digital design whiz opted for an inviting, colorful space after settling in. He filled the first floor's sweeping living room with a shag rug, plush sofas, and furnishings from Dallas stores including Again & Again, Lost Antiques, On Consignment, Dulce and Fusion in Plano.

Part of what keeps the look grounded is the fact that he ditched his familiar interior designer route and tapped talented friends and his own instincts to pull the rooms together.

"I didn't want it to look done," he says. "This space is so personal to me; it's just so comfortable."

Brittany Cobb is a Dallas freelance writer.