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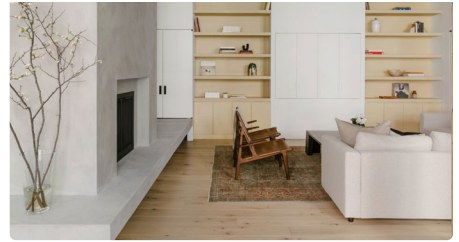
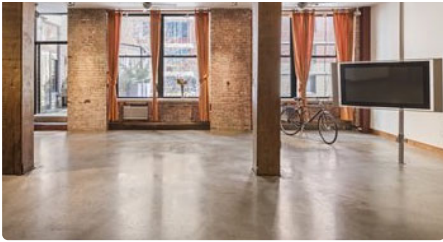
# Before & After: A Classic NYC Loft Ditches Its '90s Look for Refined Minimalism

This West Chelsea loft shines with a pared-back palette of bleached walnut and exposed brick.

Text by

Melissa Dalton

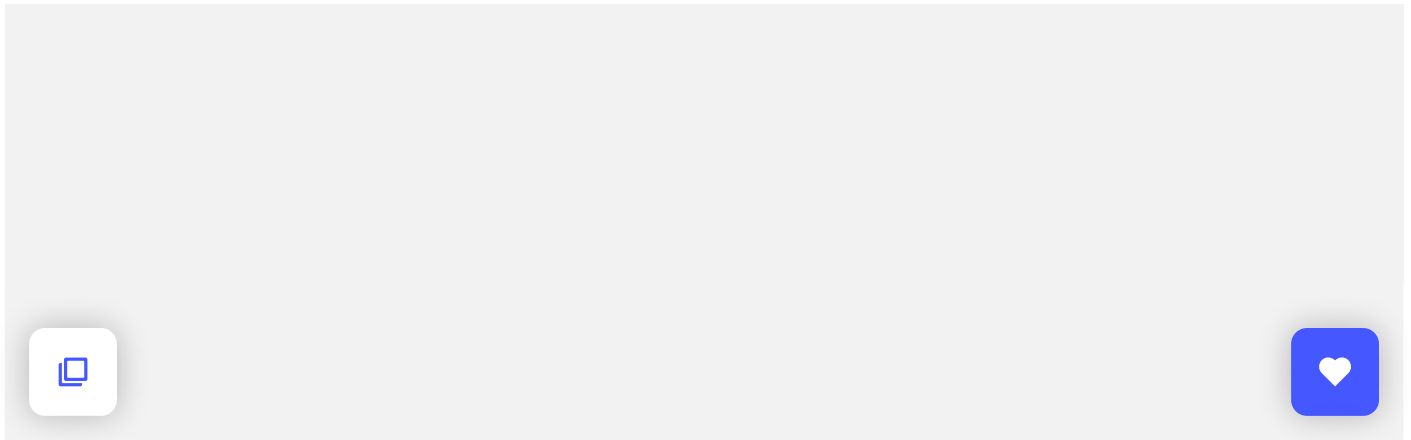


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When architects Ravi Raj and Evan Watts toured this West Chelsea property with their clients prior to purchase, the group was struck by the home's defining features. "We immediately knew it was just an incredible space, and that it had amazing bones," says Watts, a partner at D&A Companies. Watts and Raj, who leads RARARA, formed a joint design team to help their friends, who purchased the loft in 2017.

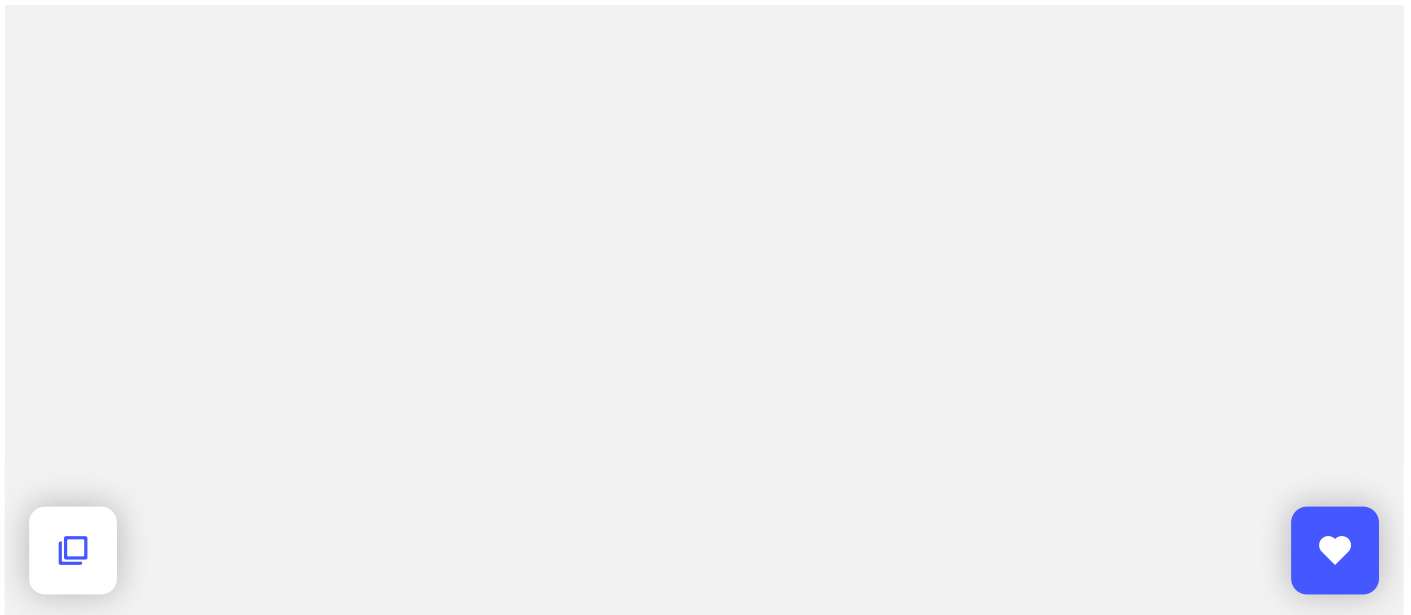
"It had beautiful brick walls and piers and beams—it was just an iconic old New York loft space," says Watts. "But it was also immediately apparent that it was dated. And it wasn't really optimized in terms of a layout. We knew very quickly that some simple moves could really make the space into a beautiful home."

## Before: Main Room



**Before:** The 2,700-square-foot loft had a sizable great room with enviable features, including exposed brick walls and heavy timber structural beams.

Isaacs Ganz Real Estate



**Before:** The loft is located in an industrial building that had been converted in 1996. The finishes throughout the home reflected that era.

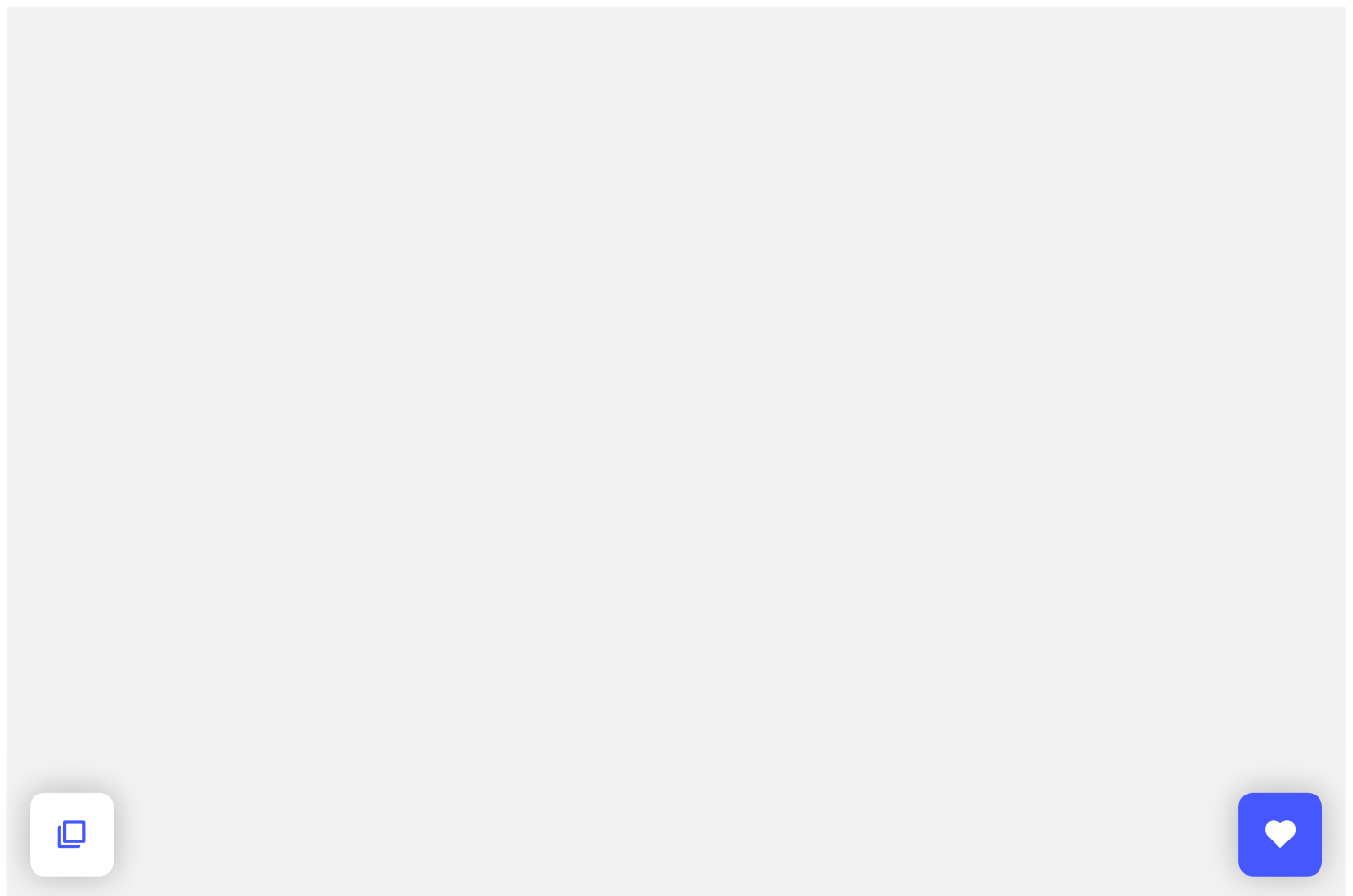
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The loft sits in the Spears Building, which was built in 1880 by the Kinney Brothers in West Chelsea. The building started life as a cigarette packing facility, then became a furniture warehouse in the 1920s, before it was converted into residences in 1996—and today it enjoys views of the High Line.

The conversion preserved many of the building's historic details, such as the oversized openings and thick masonry bearing walls, all of which the homeowners loved. But there were some previous design decisions that didn't elicit quite as much fervor.

For starters, the living area's dropped ceiling awkwardly wrapped the structural framework. Concrete floors tipped too industrial for the owners, who have children. A heavy beam bisecting the fireplace wall distorted the room's scale, competing with the soaring ceilings rather than accentuating them, and the in-wall AC units were an eyesore.

## After: Main Room

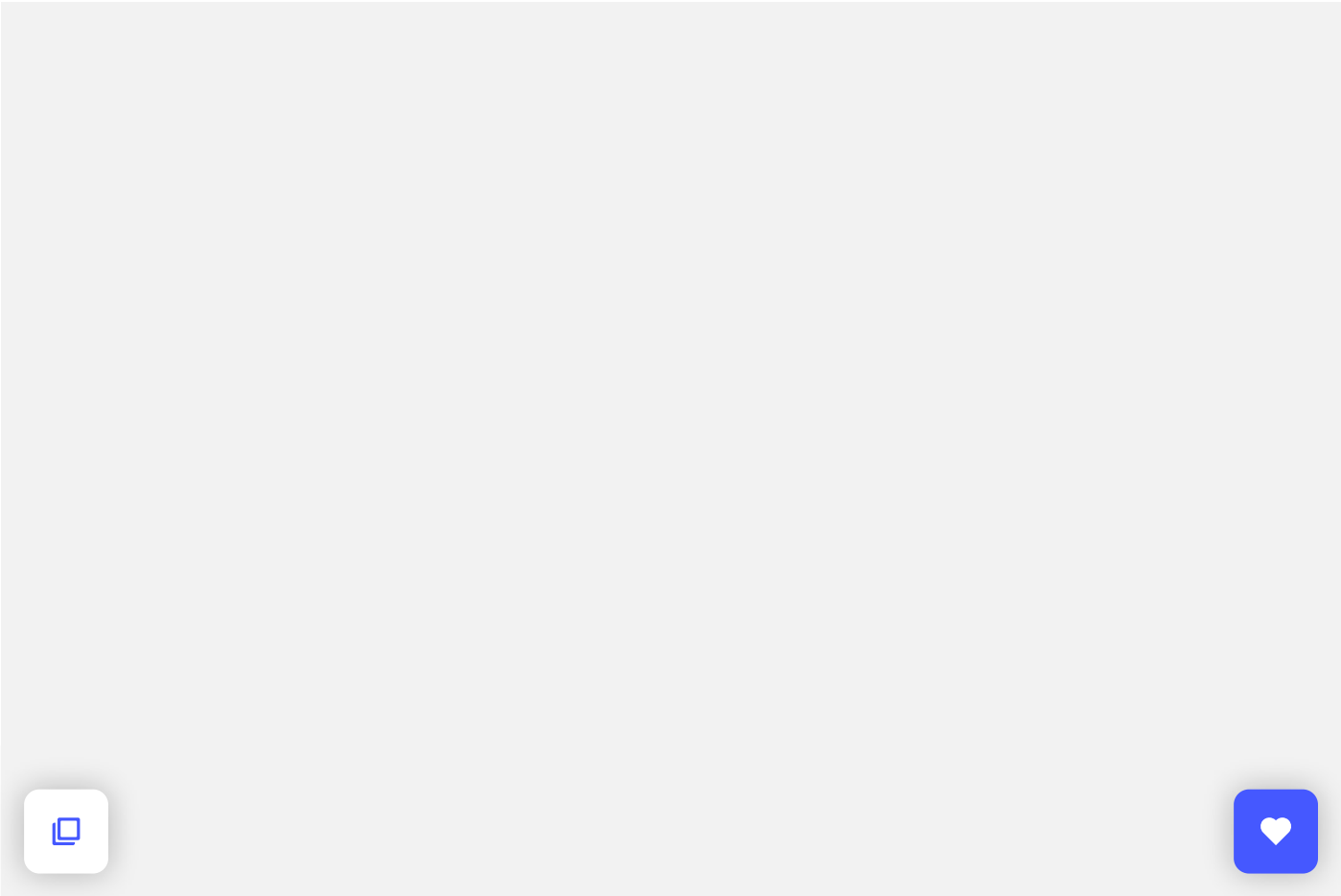


Raj and Watts extended the fireplace column to the ceiling to highlight the room's expansive scale, and had it coated in concrete plaster. It was important to retain the wood-burning fireplace—a rarity

in the city—but "we wanted to re-clad it in a material that also spoke to the industrial past of the building," says Raj.

Photo: Nick Glimenakis

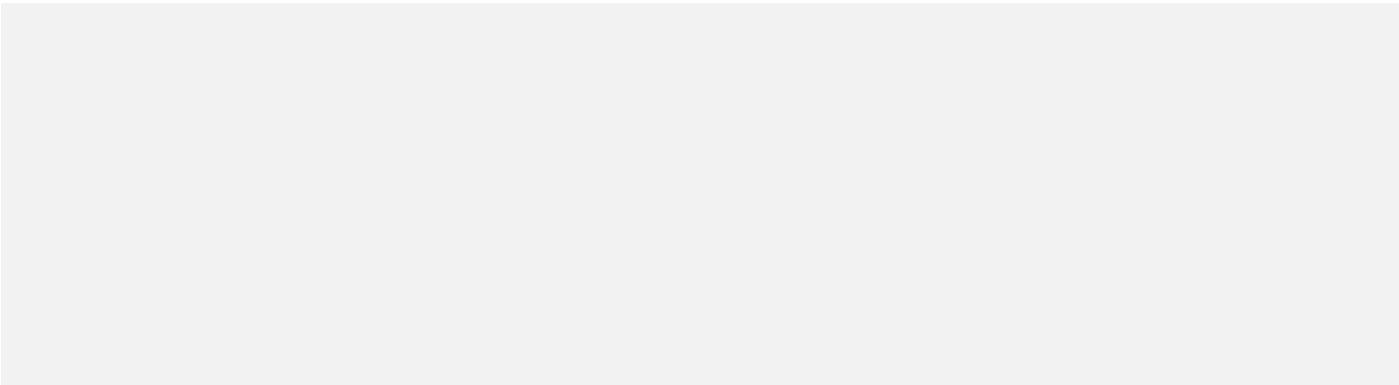
*Photo Categories: [living room](#), [storage](#), [chair](#), [light hardwood floors](#), [recessed lighting](#), [sofa](#), [bench](#), [coffee tables](#), [shelves](#), [standard layout fireplace](#), [console tables](#), [bookcase](#), [ceiling lighting](#), [wood burning fireplace](#)*

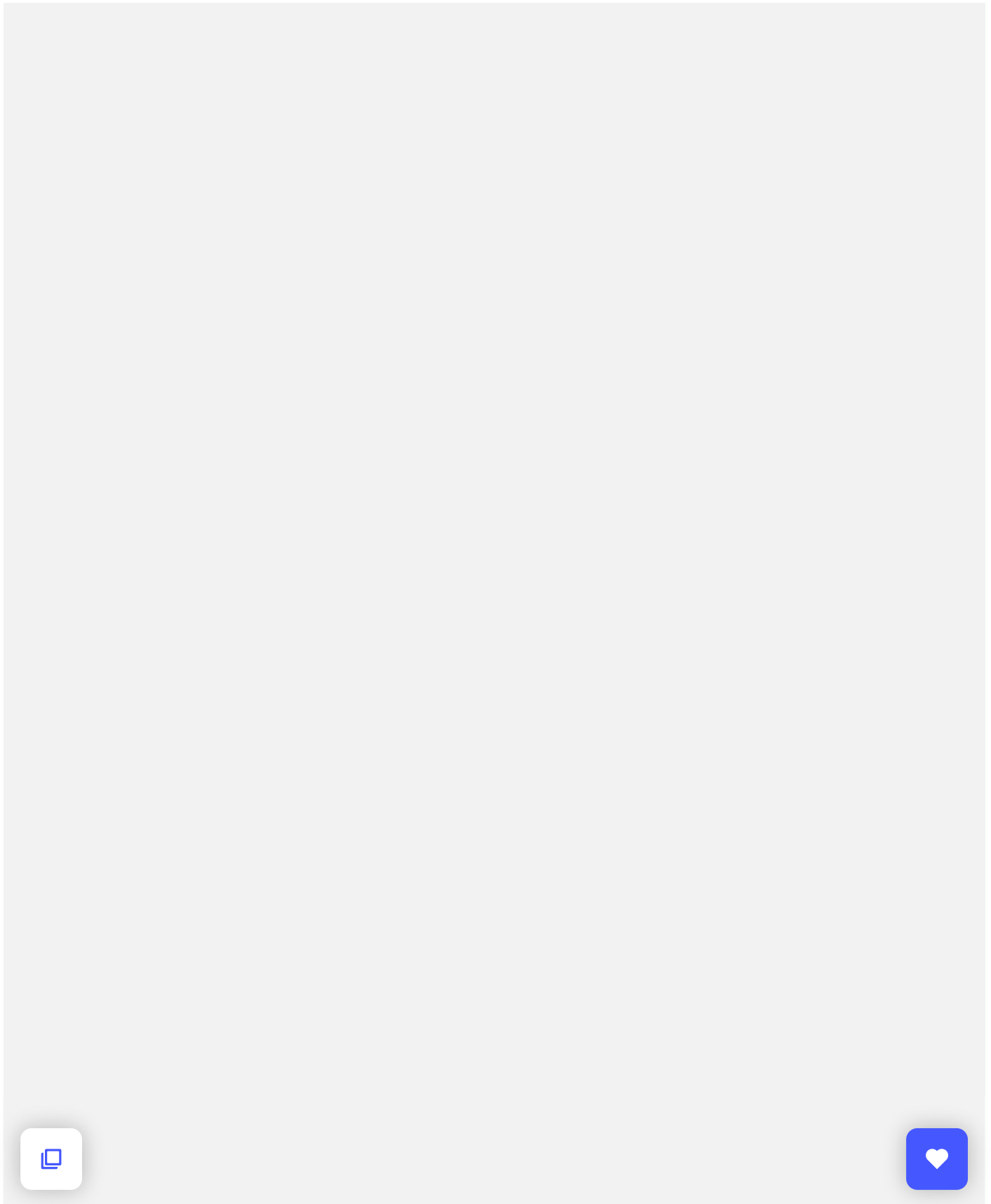


Floor-to-ceiling shelves and storage bookend a cabinet that conceals the television.

Photo: Nick Glimenakis

*Photo Categories: [living room](#), [bench](#), [ceiling lighting](#), [storage](#), [wood burning fireplace](#), [console tables](#), [coffee tables](#), [recessed lighting](#), [light hardwood floors](#), [standard layout fireplace](#), [bookcase](#), [shelves](#), [sofa](#), [chair](#)*

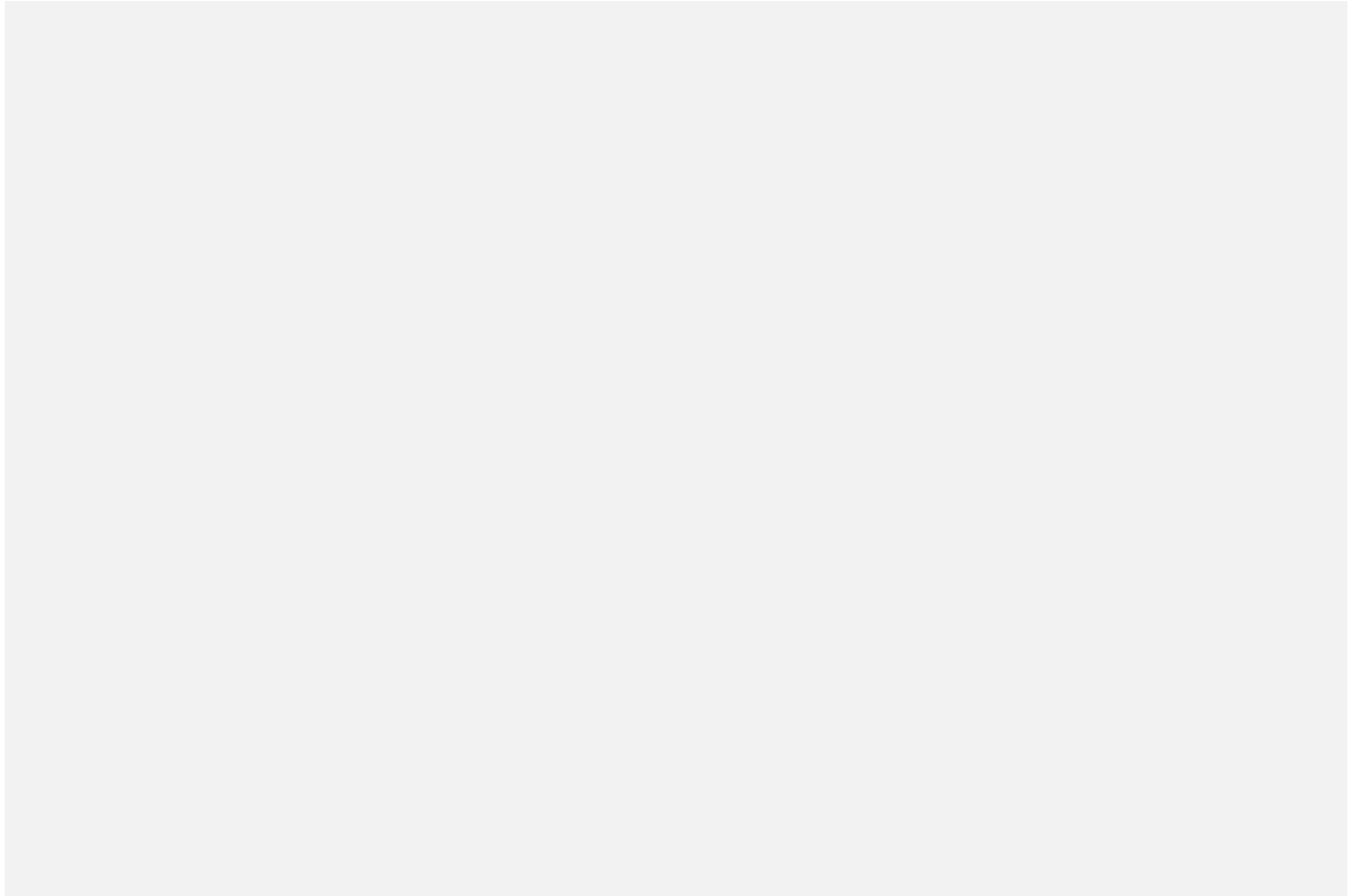




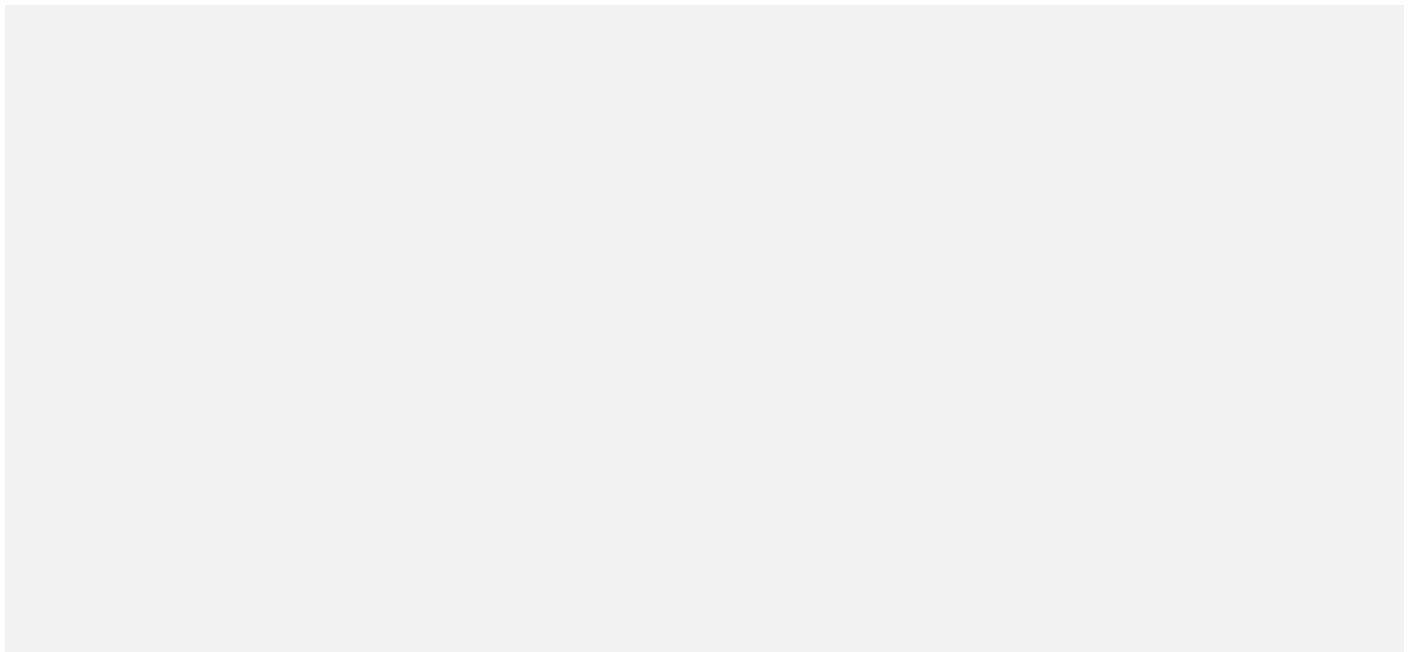
**The pair replaced the cluttered firewood storage with a floating hearth that can double as a seat and display for art.**

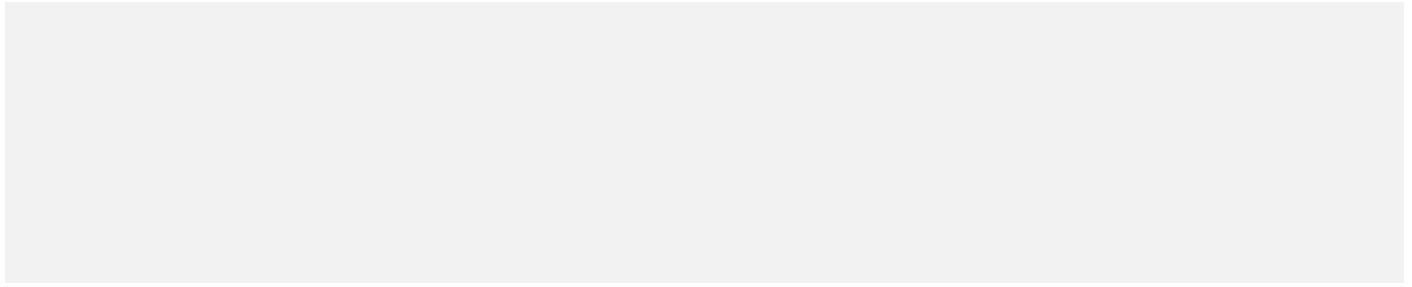
Photo: Nick Glimenakis

*Photo Categories: living room, storage, bench, chair, sofa, coffee tables, bookcase, recessed lighting, shelves, ceiling lighting, ottomans, standard layout fireplace, wood burning fireplace, light hardwood floors*



**A new HVAC system fills the space between the brick columns at the windows. It's a more graceful, streamlined treatment than in-wall units.**

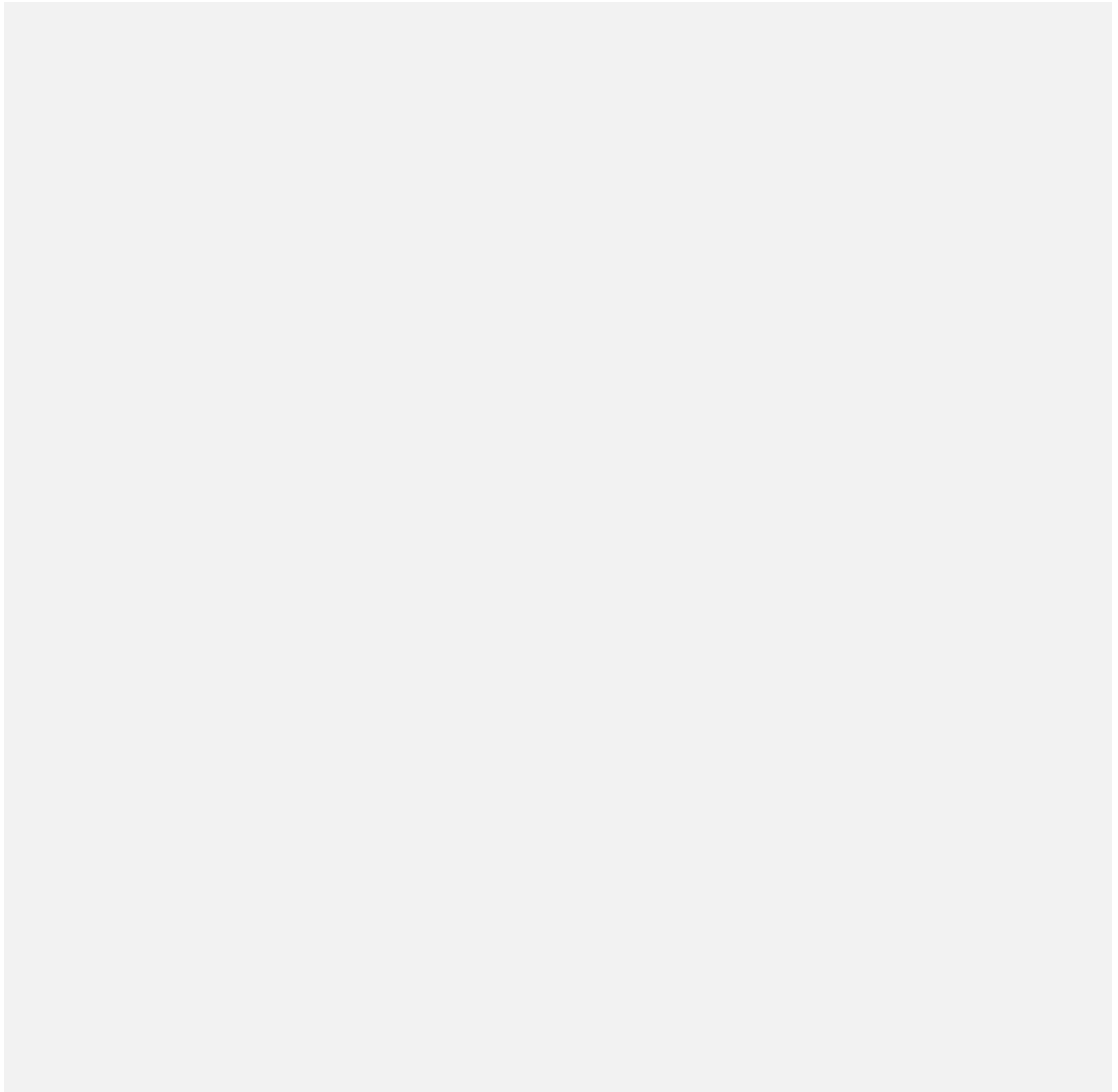




The exposed brick was left alone to convey the building's storied history.

## Shop the Look

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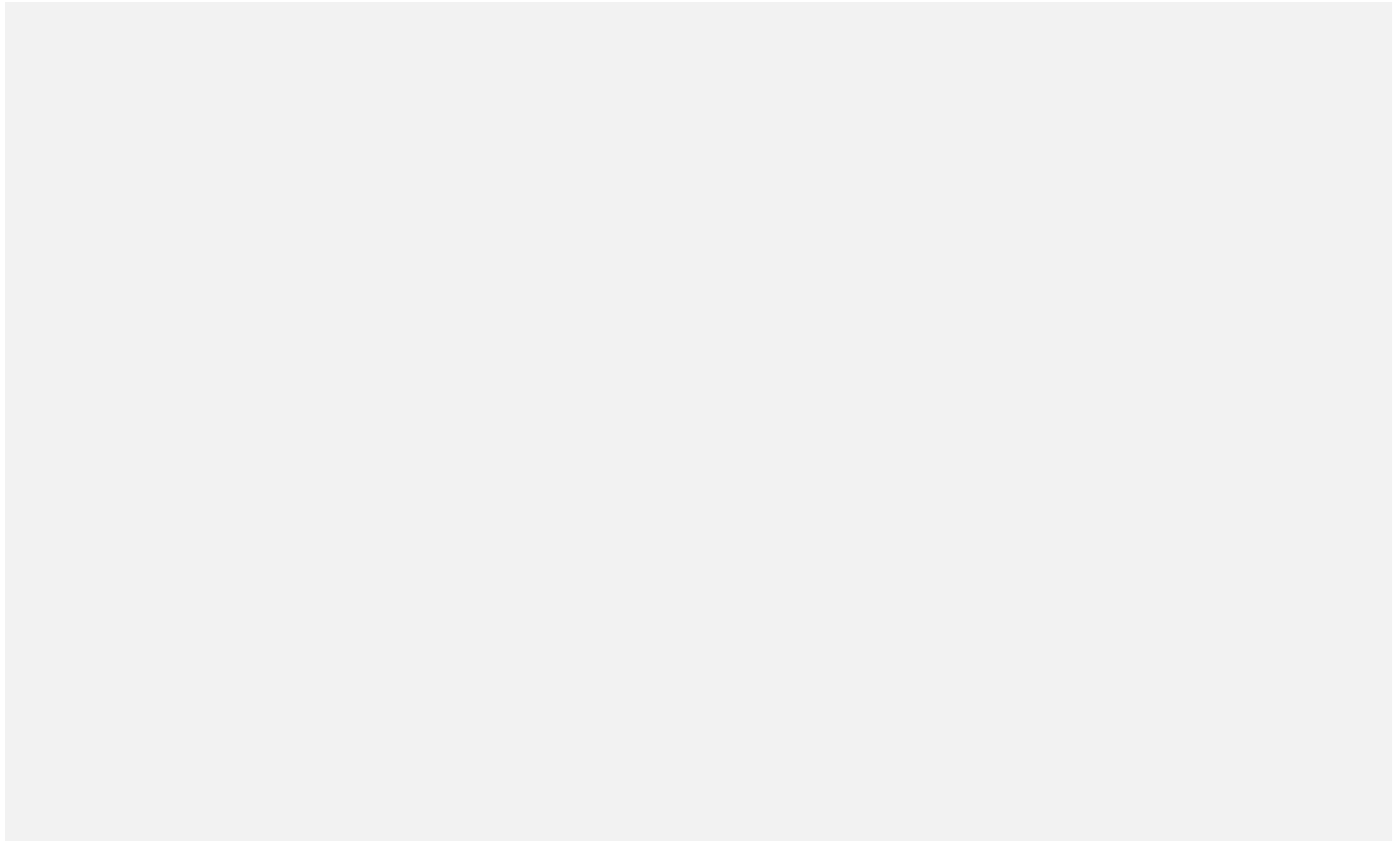
The thick brick walls and preserved lintels are a reference to the building's former life as a factory.

During the demo process, the team discovered that the dropped ceiling in the main room concealed the building's intact structural framework. With that pulled away, the grid of scarred wood beams and cast-iron brackets better emphasize the generous ceiling height. A reworked fireplace column and floor-to-ceiling shelves draw the eye upwards.

"That was the most exciting moment, when we realized those beams were in great shape," says Watts. Since the owners wanted to preserve that patina, the ceiling beams only had to be lightly sanded and sealed, and the layers of paint on the capitals were kept. A palette of bleached walnut (used for the wide-plank flooring and shelves) and concrete plaster (at the hearth) temper the brilliant orange tones in the preserved brick and underscore the historical wear.

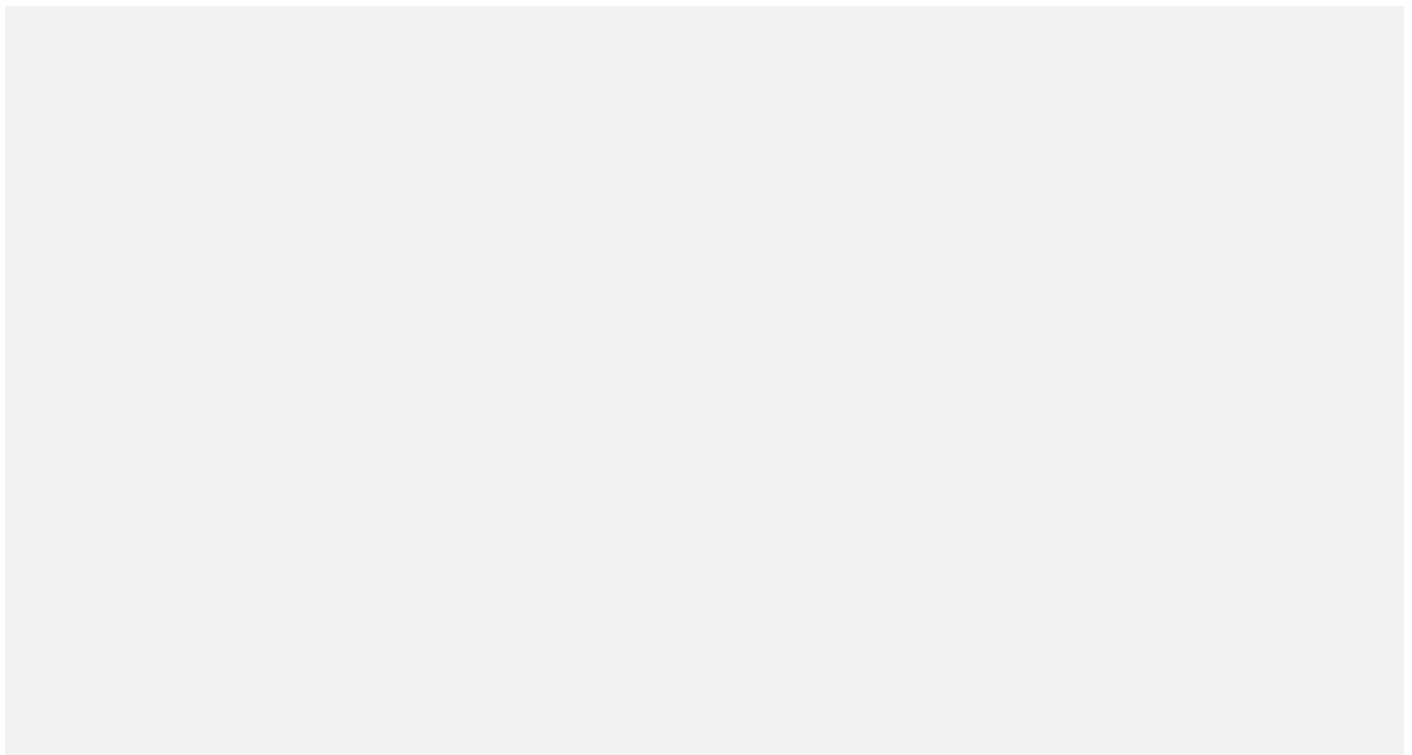
## **Before: Kitchen**



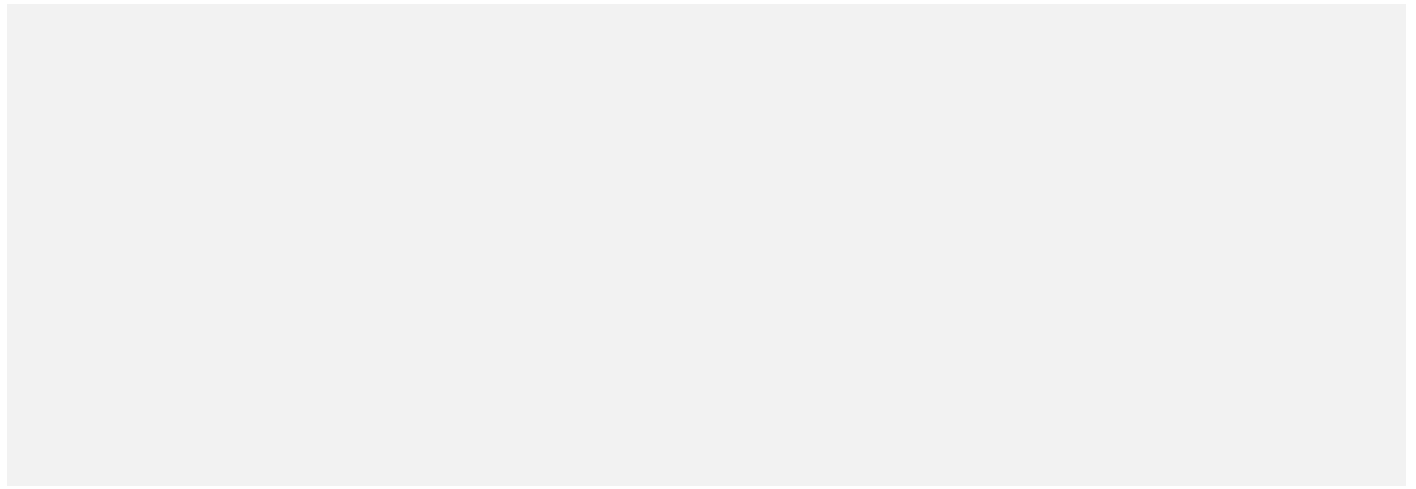


**Before:** A teardrop-shaped island monopolized the kitchen space, and the bank of wine storage was removed.

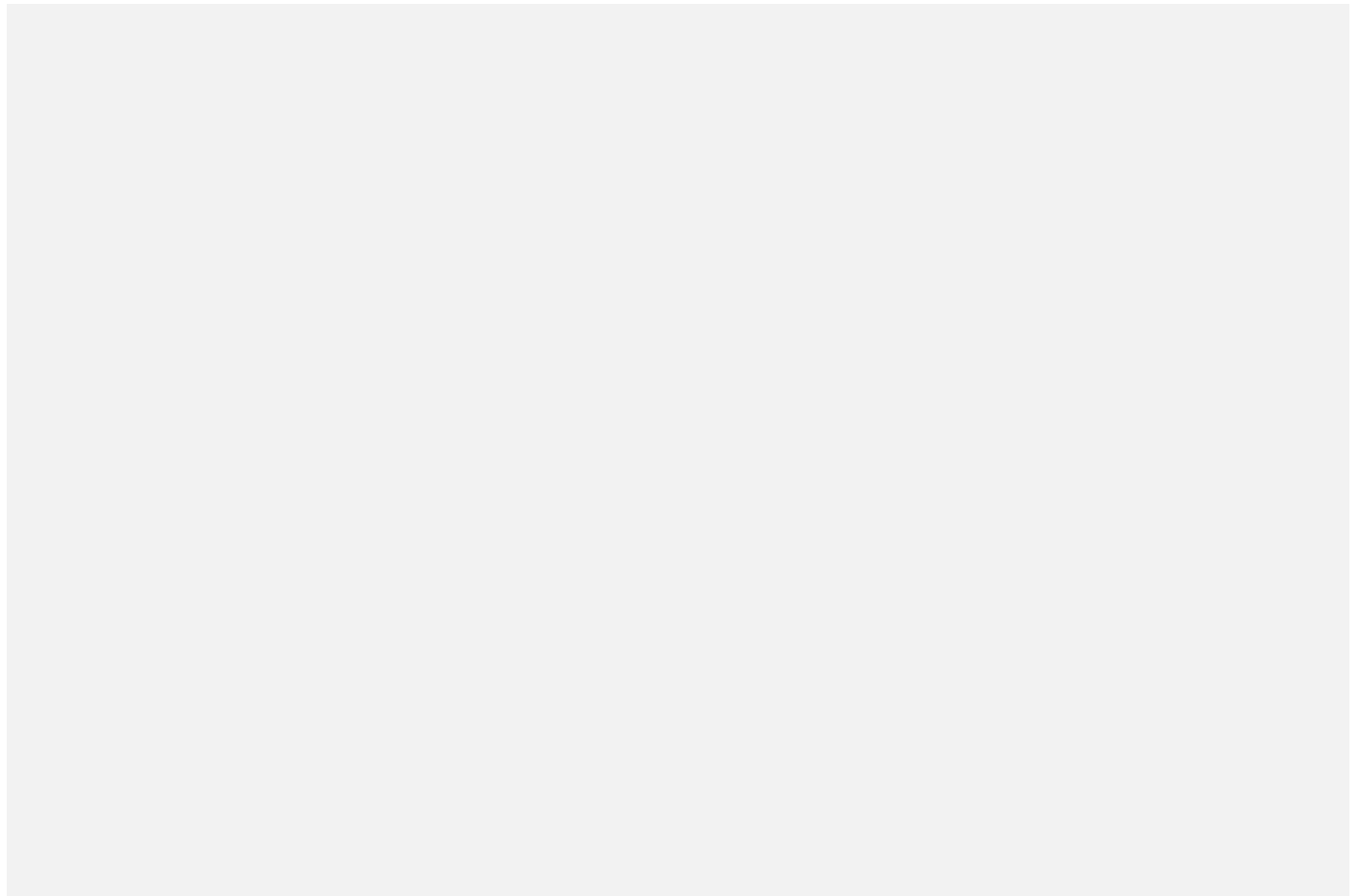
## **After: Kitchen and Eating Nook**



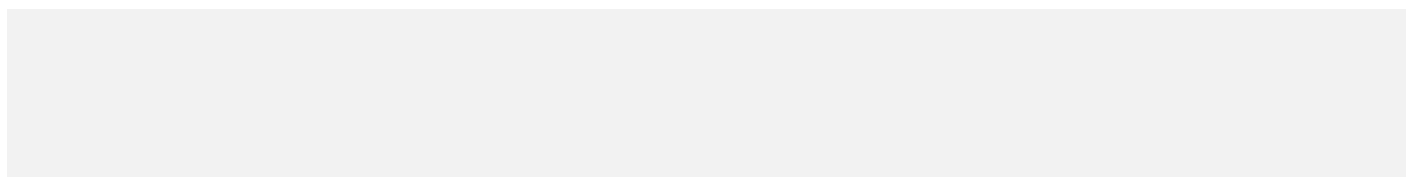
The architects reused much of the existing walnut cabinetry, giving it an ebonized finish for contrast.

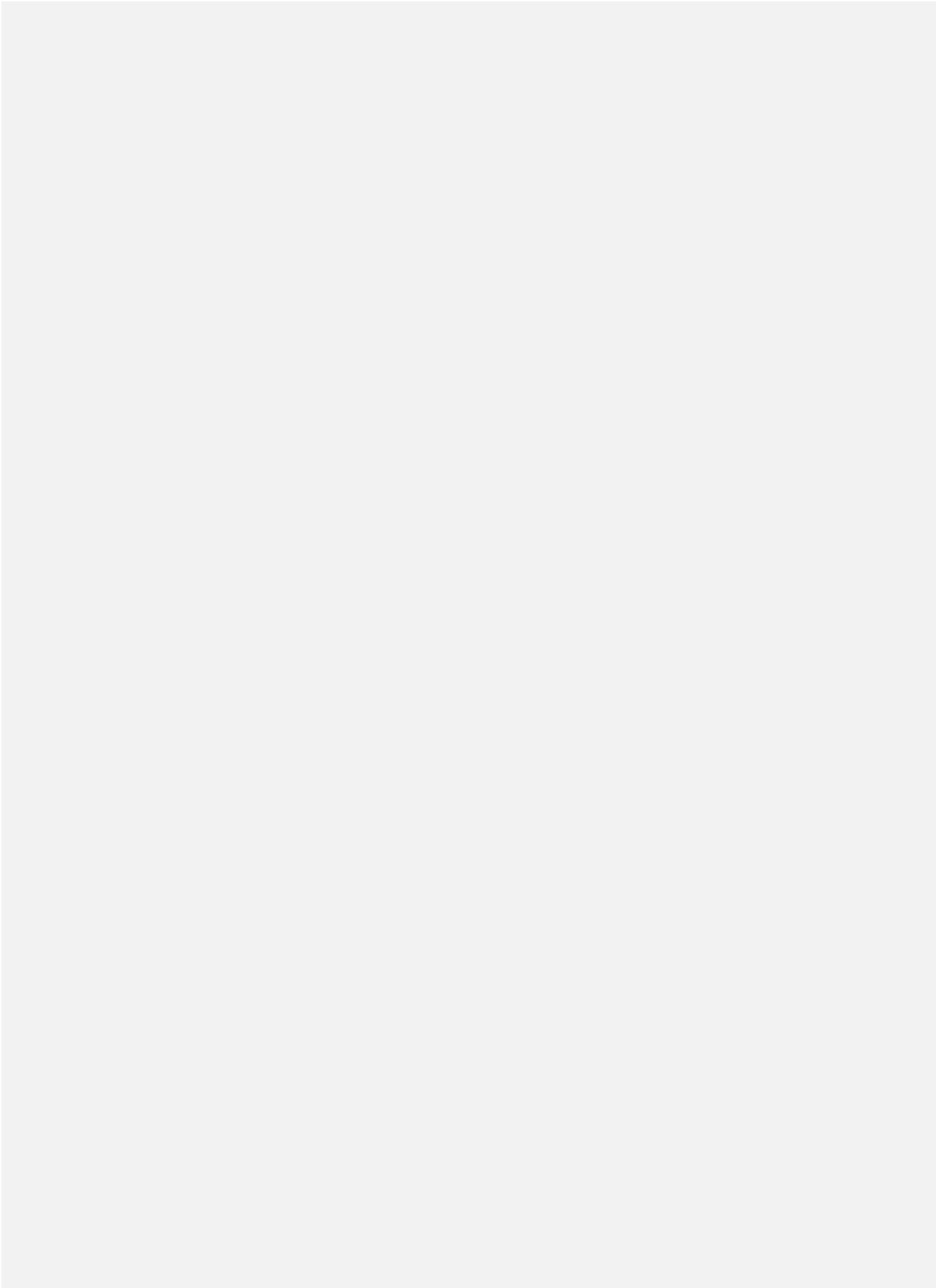


**The stainless-steel elements, including the counter and cabinets, were also kept in place for their industrial character. The island was reworked and topped with marble.**



**Marble covers the backsplash, and new upper cabinets inset with fluted glass were added.**





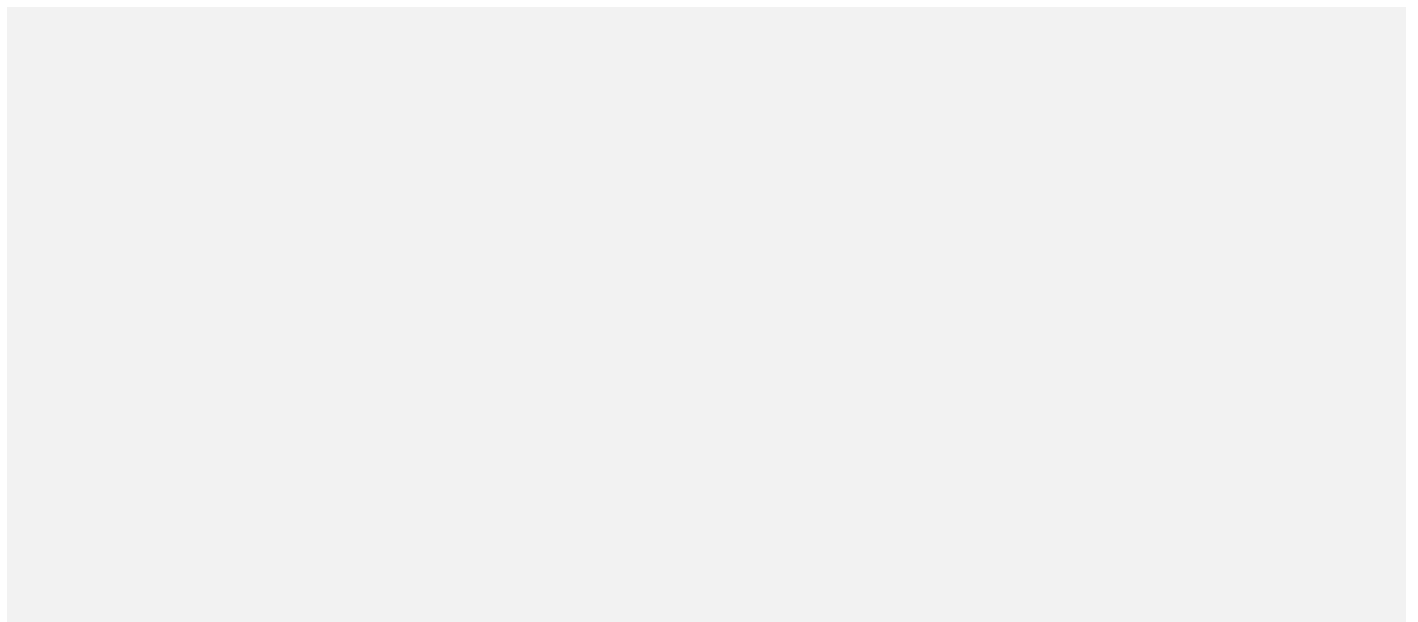
**The brick wall that the wine storage once occupied was patched and repaired as necessary, while still bearing marks of the past.**

When the clients bought the loft, it had two bedrooms and an office accessed via a double door off the dining area. After giving the kitchen a new layout that accommodates an eat-in table, the team was able to repurpose the previous dining area into a bedroom. "It was a bit of a puzzle rejigging the floor plan to make sure that as we added more space, we kept natural light [throughout]," says Raj.

By reconfiguring the bedroom floor plan, the pair were able to create space for a new bathroom in the existing footprint as well. Now, there are two private clusters off the main areas: one for the master suite, and one for the two bedrooms and their shared bathroom. A third bathroom can be used by guests.

The new layout better balances the public and private wings of the loft, retaining the coveted openness that lofts promise with more intimate areas that can let family members get away. "One thing that we were trying to achieve was to retain that open feeling, but also provide separate spaces for their family to inhabit," says Raj.

## **Before: Dining Area and Office**





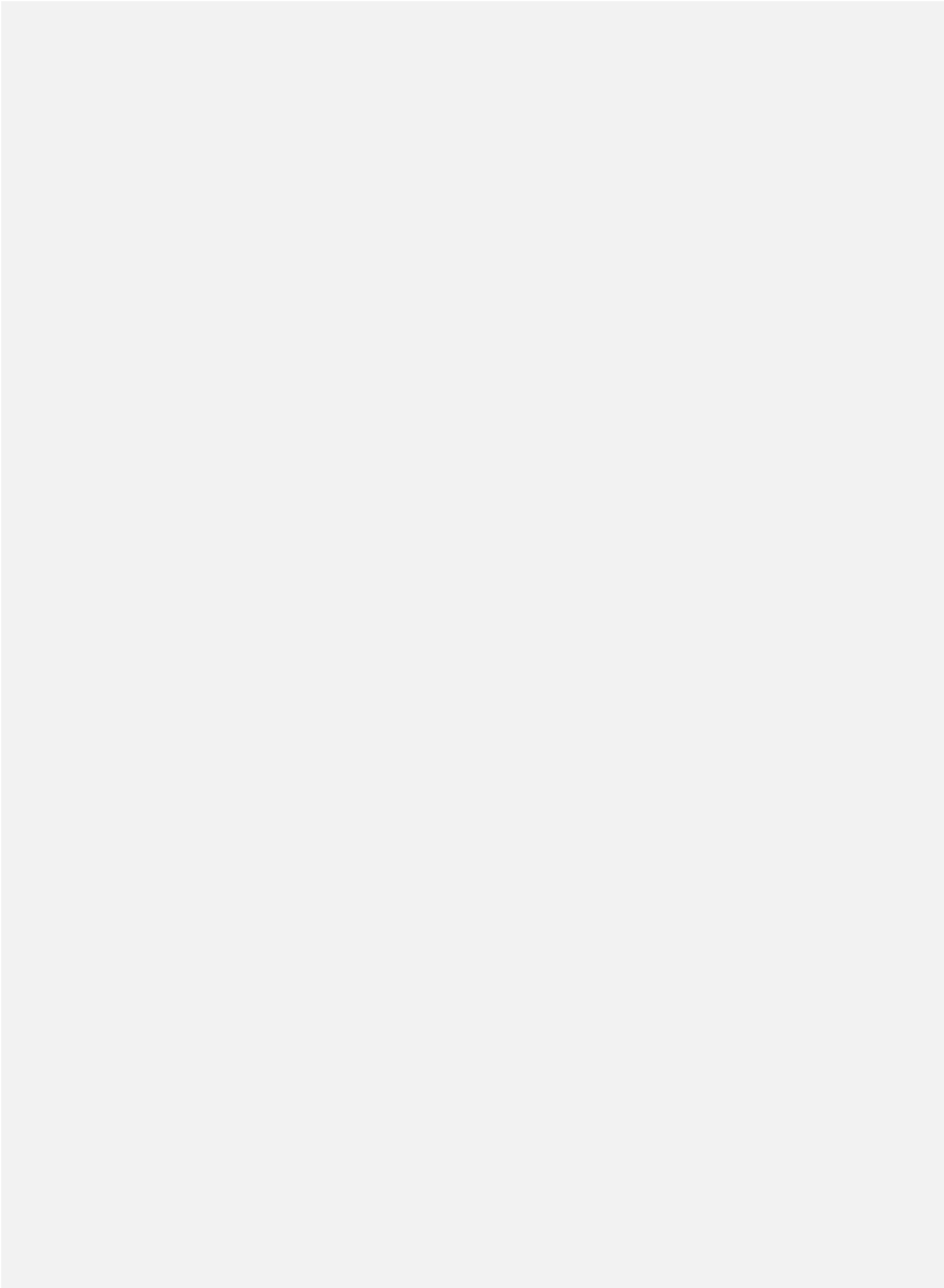
**Before:** By reconfiguring the kitchen layout, the architects were able to repurpose the dining room and smooth out the bedroom layout.



**Before:** This office became an enclosed bedroom.

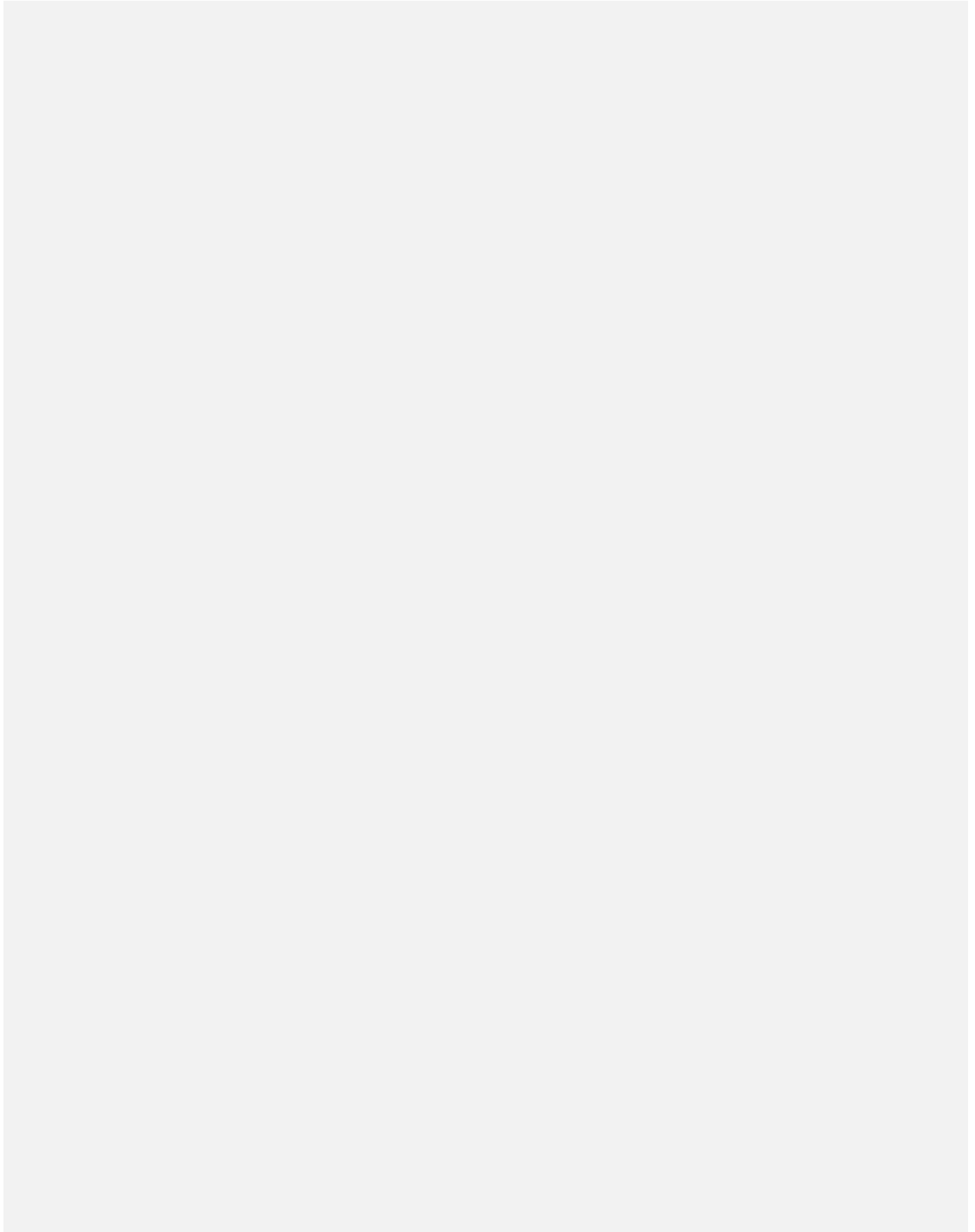
## **After: Bedroom Cluster**

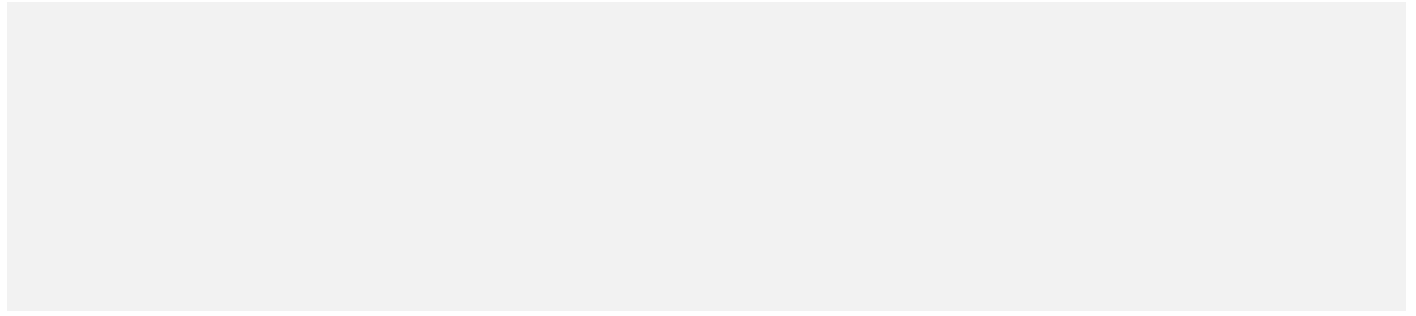




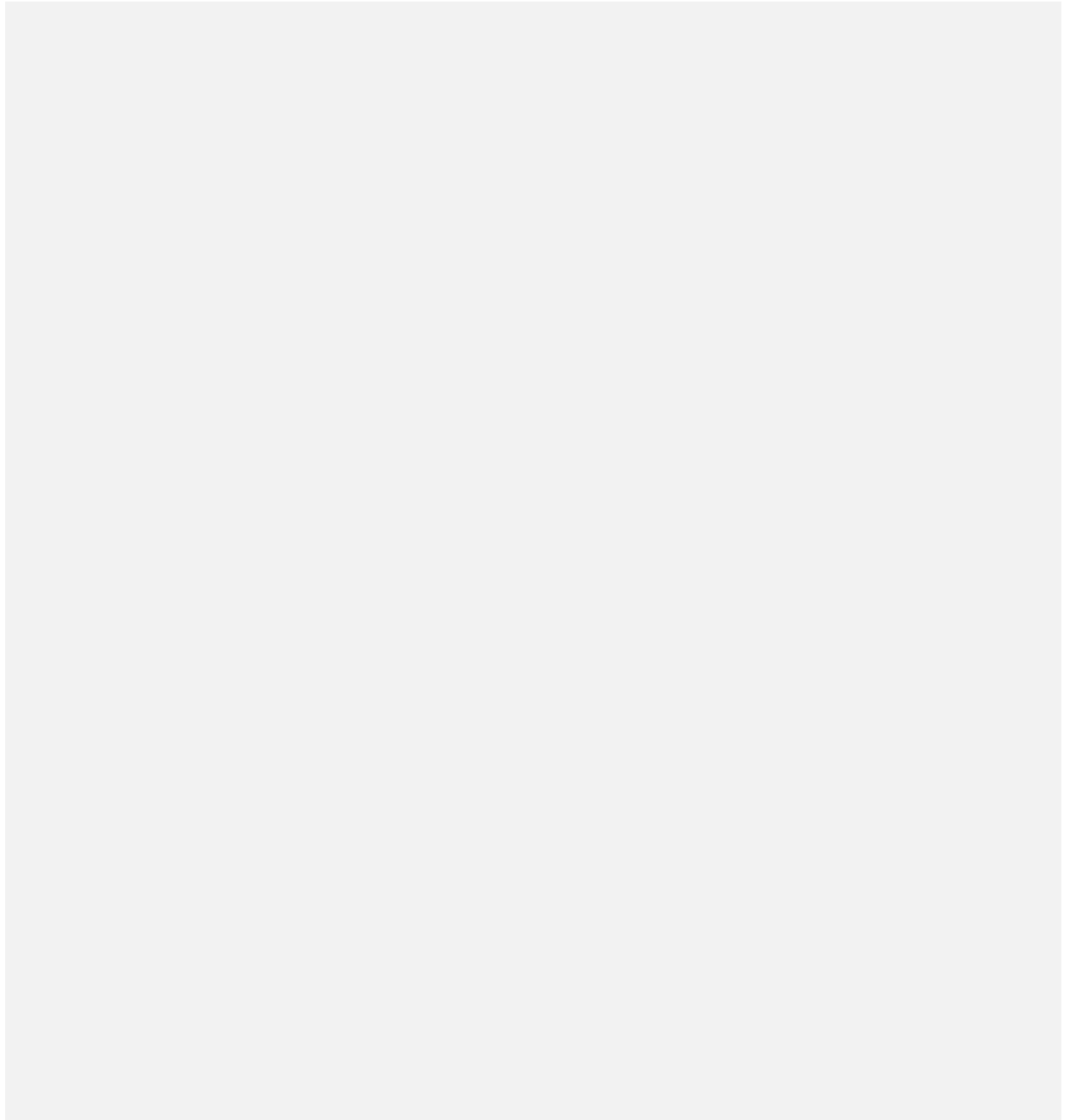


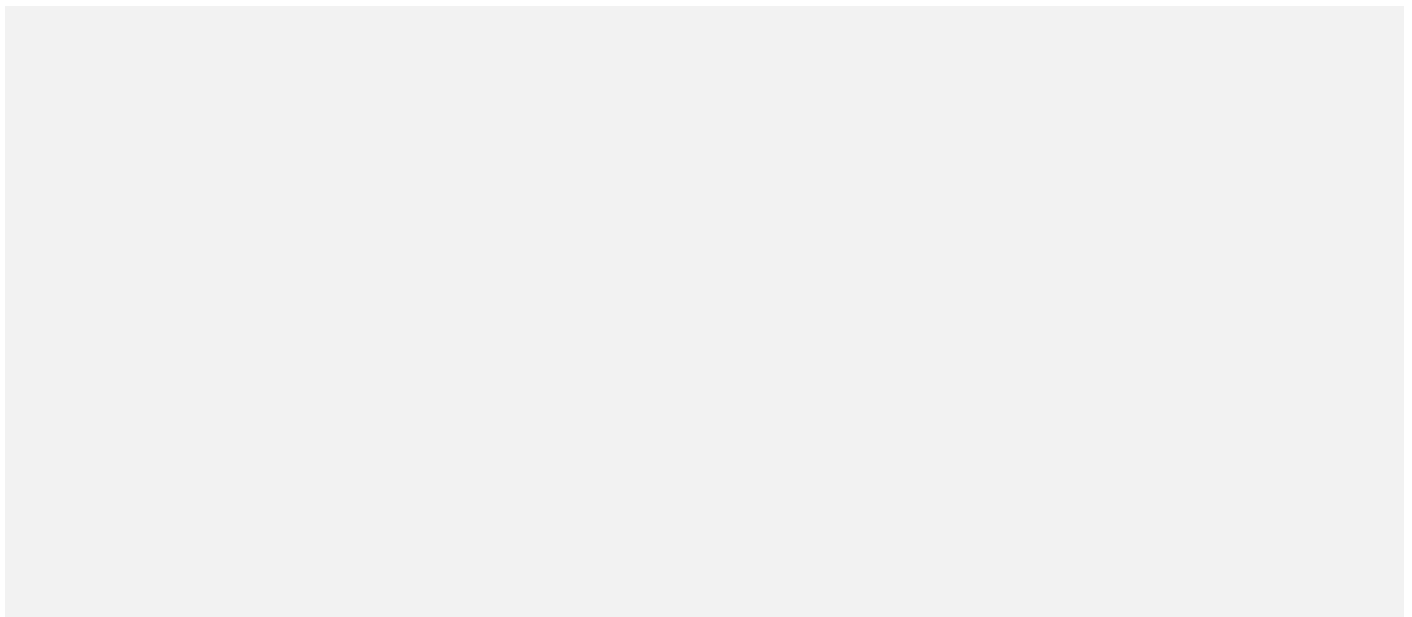
**Now, a short hallway joins the two bedrooms and shared bathroom, which is through the door to the left. "It's large enough to feel like the loft that it is, but also intimate in these back areas," says Watts.**



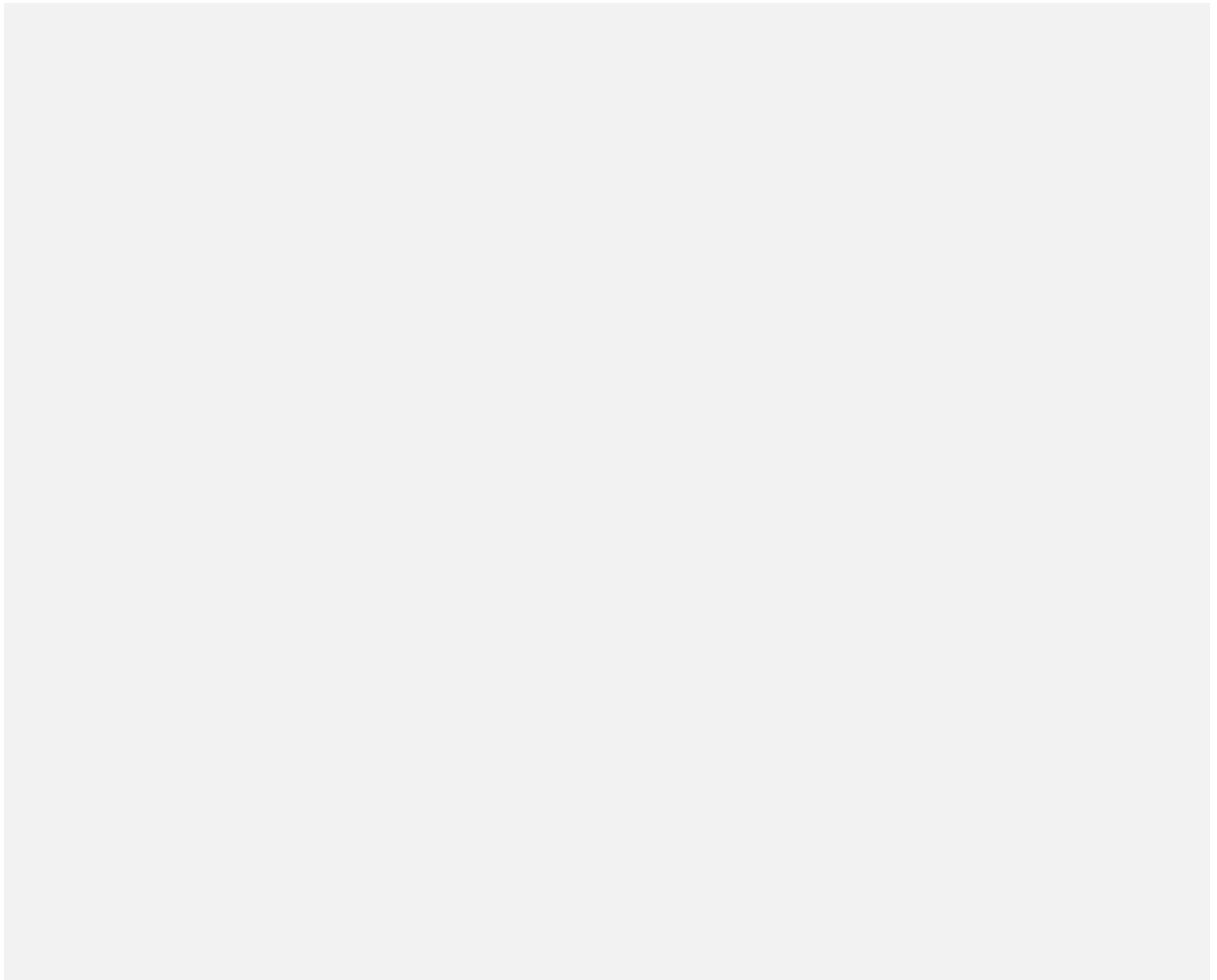


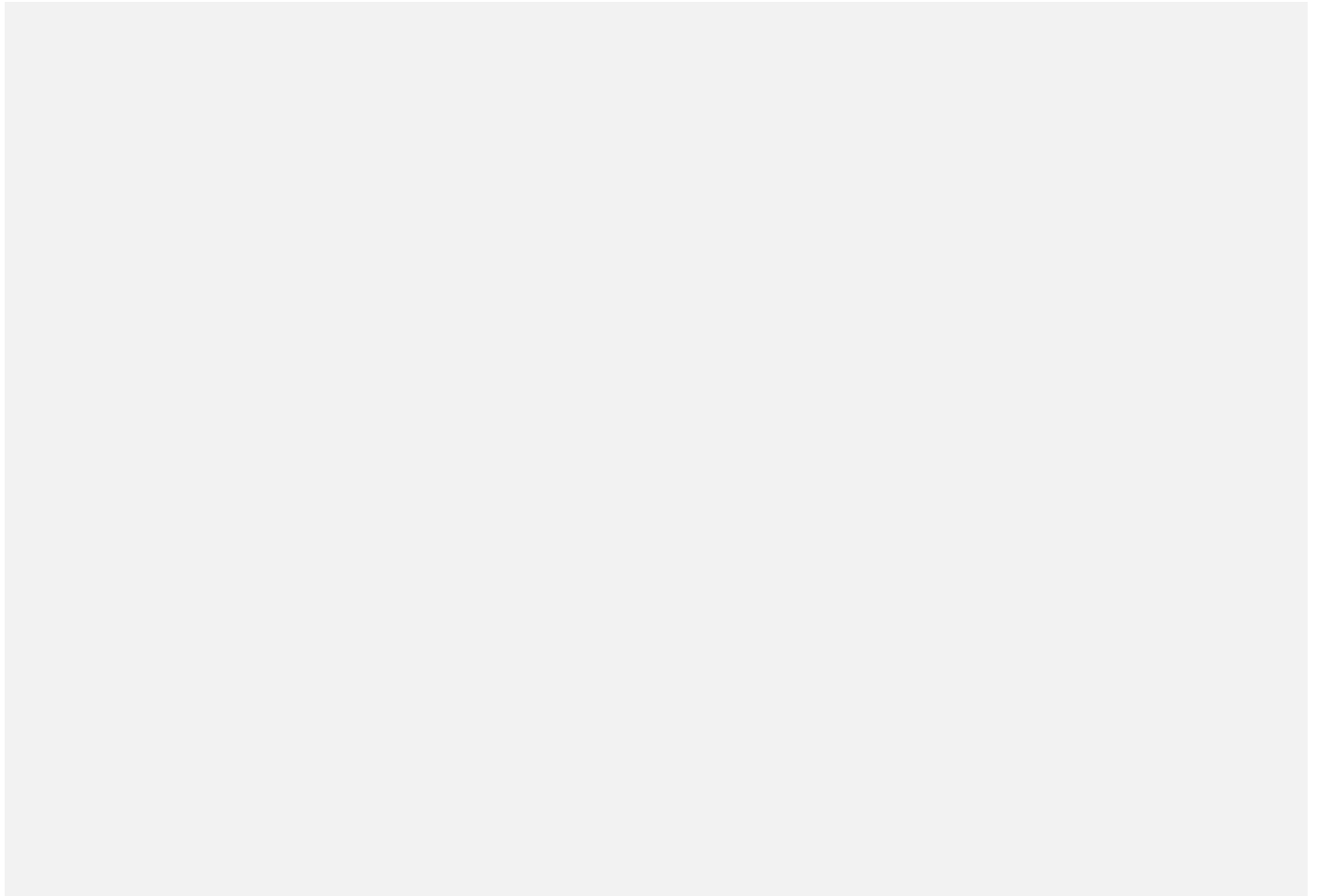
**A bunk room is located at the end of the hallway, in the former office.**





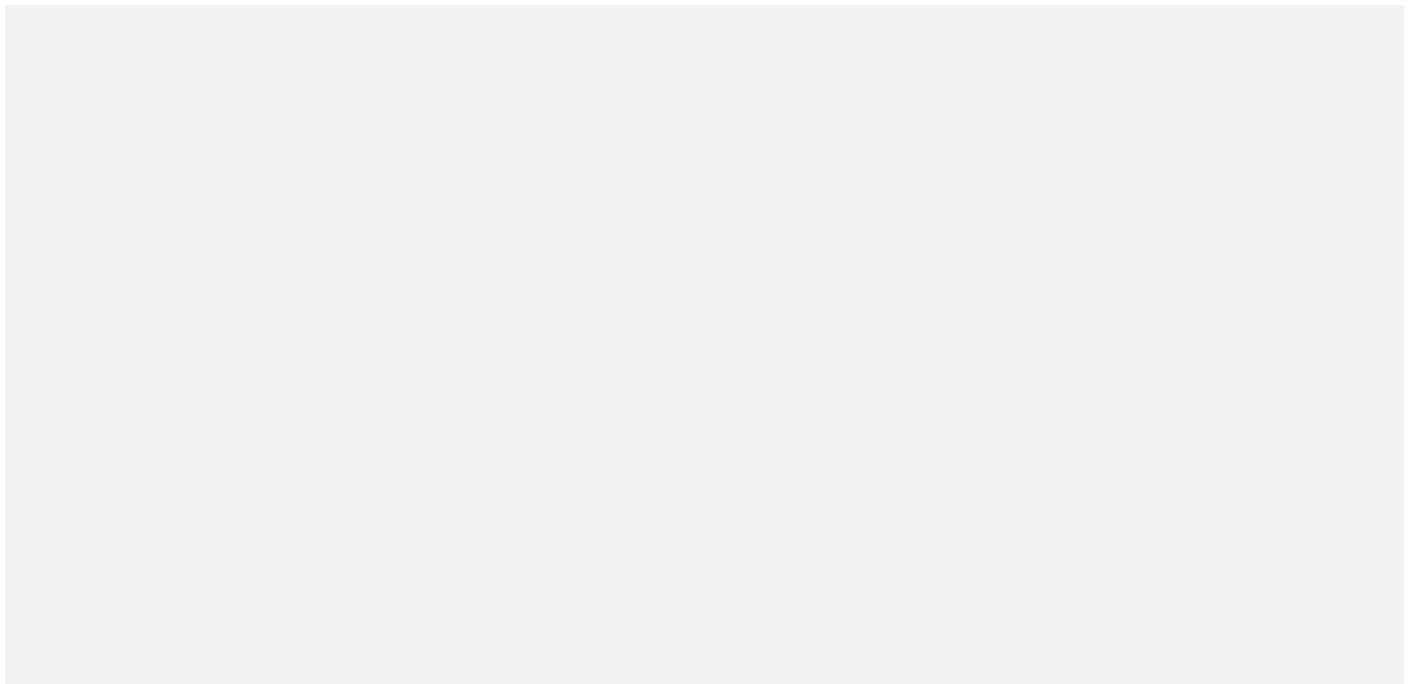
The new bedroom overlooks the outdoor terrace and the High Line. In its previous location, the bedroom only had a light well for natural illumination.

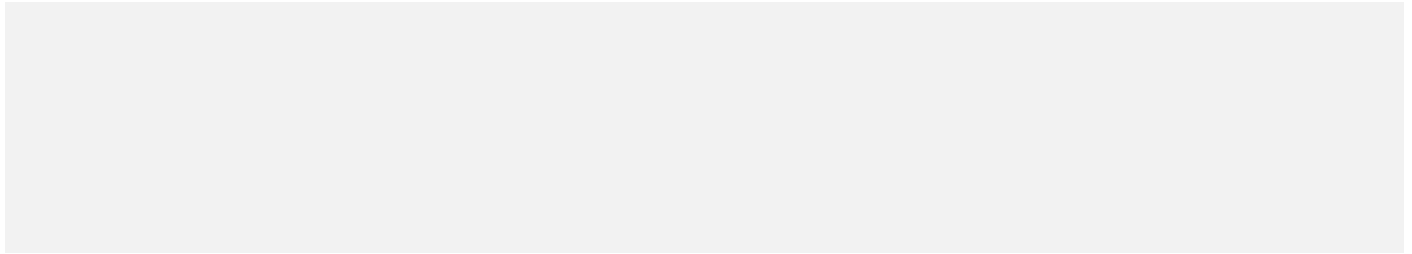




The new bathroom is in the former bedroom, and it's primarily used by the bedroom occupants.

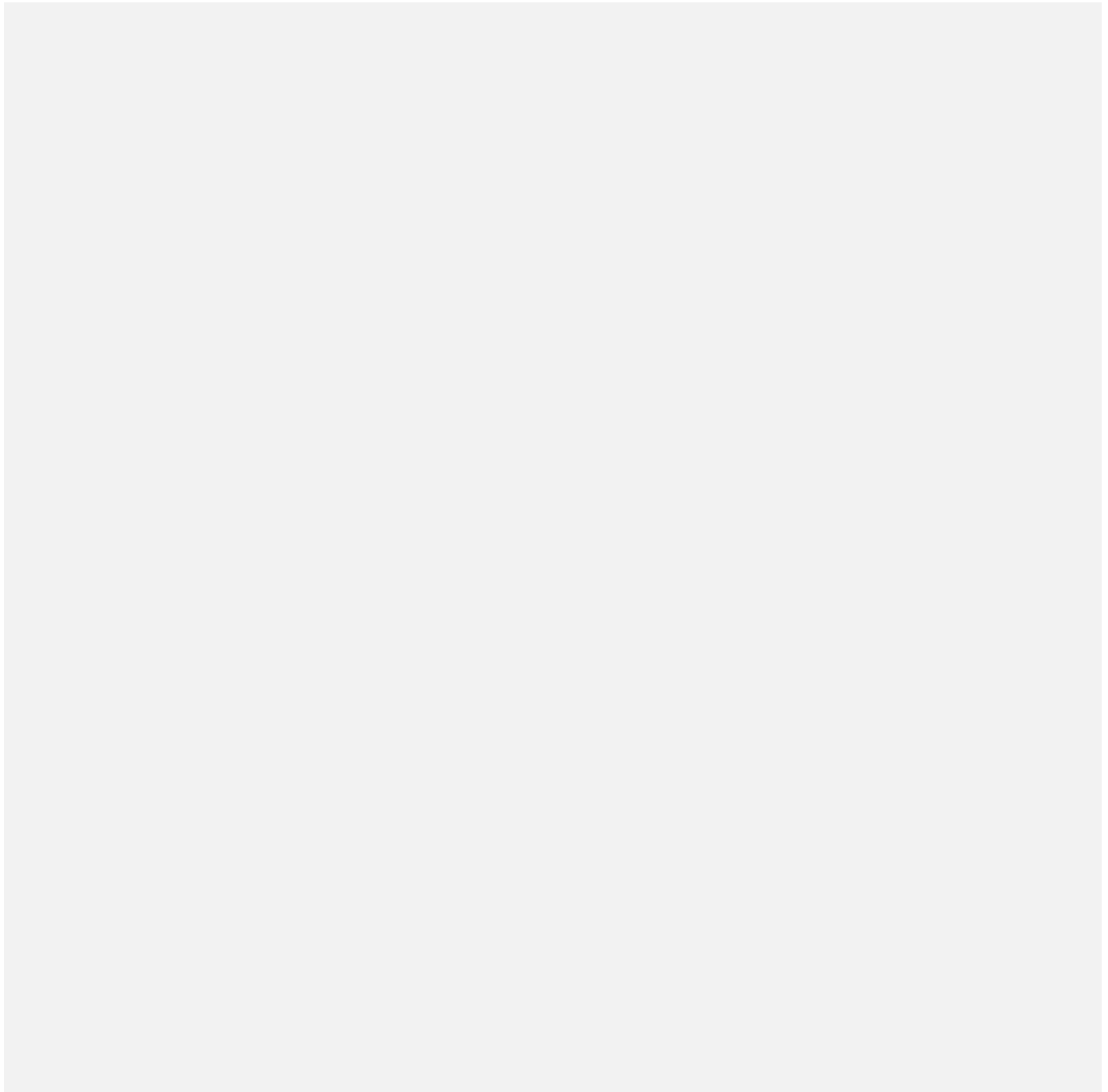
## **Before: Bathroom**

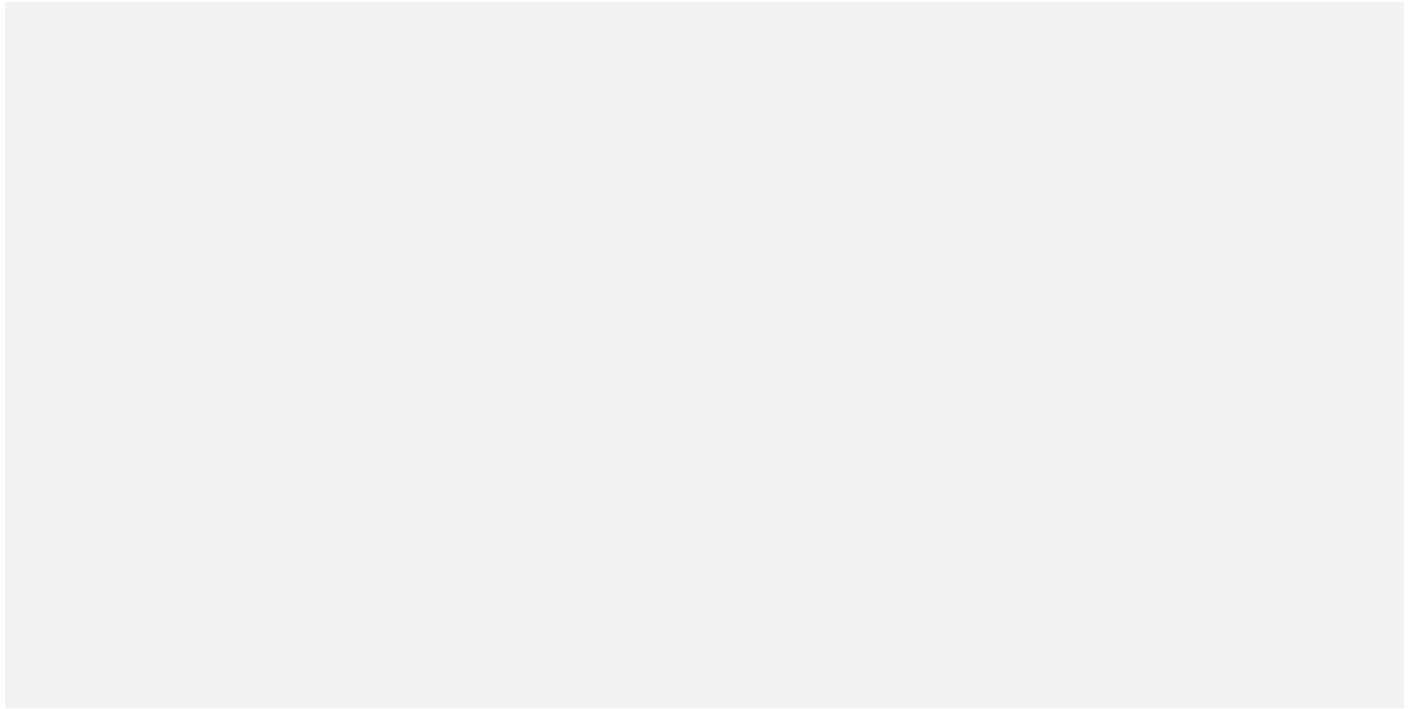




Before: The hall bathroom also received an update.

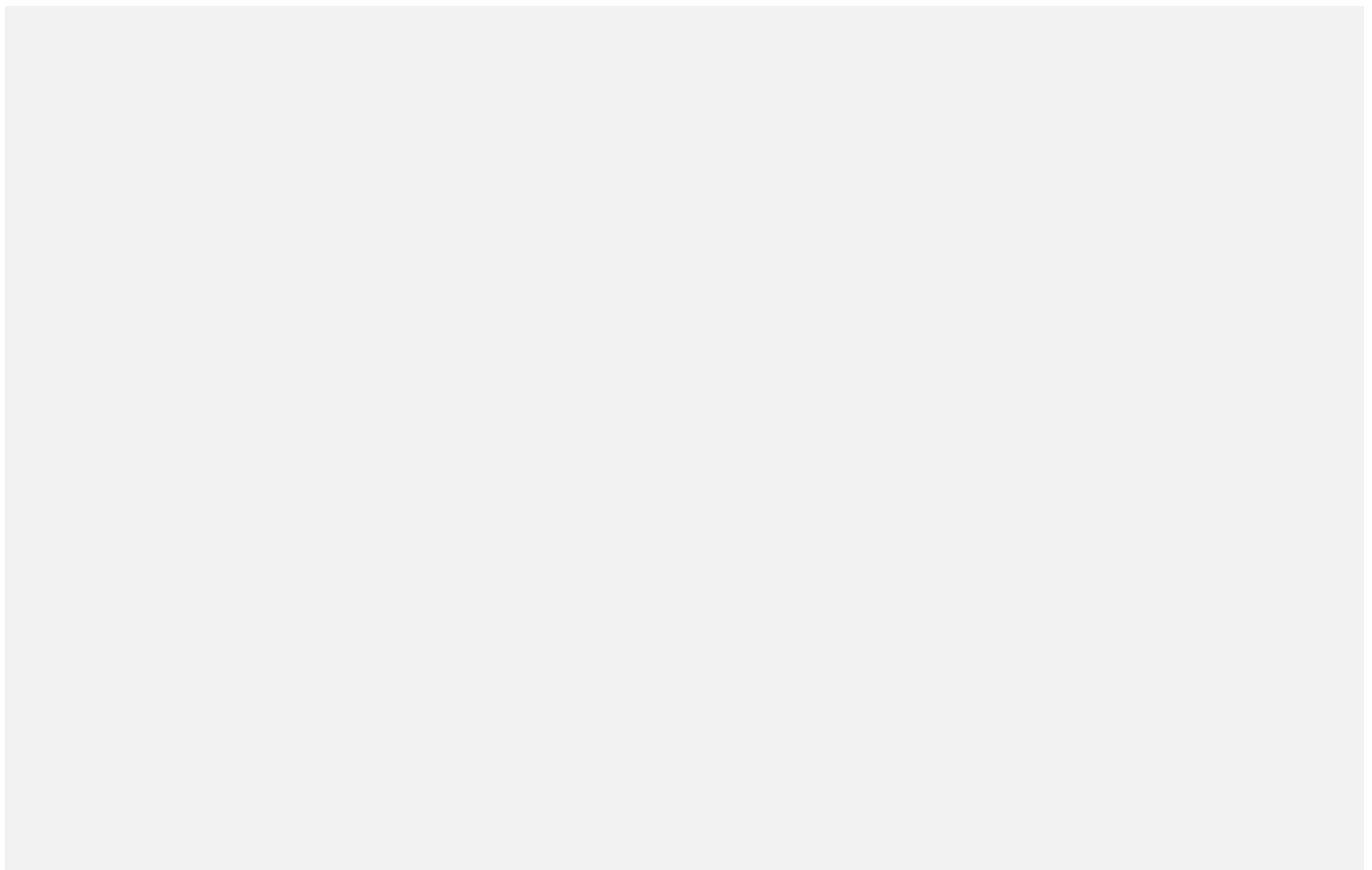
## After: Bathroom



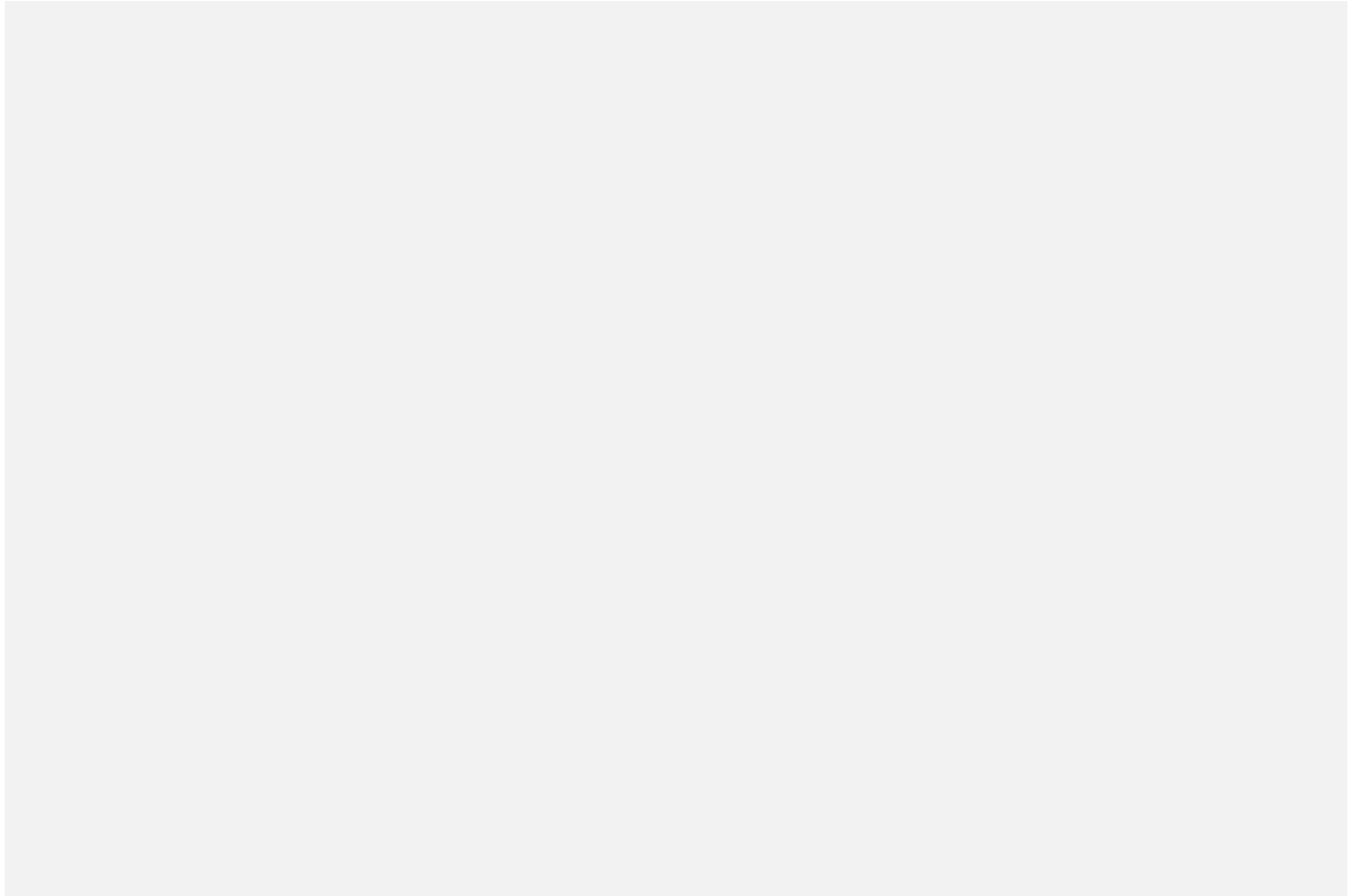


The showpiece in the new bathroom is the floating vanity with an integrated sink carved from a block of Nero Marquina marble.

## **Before: Master Suite**

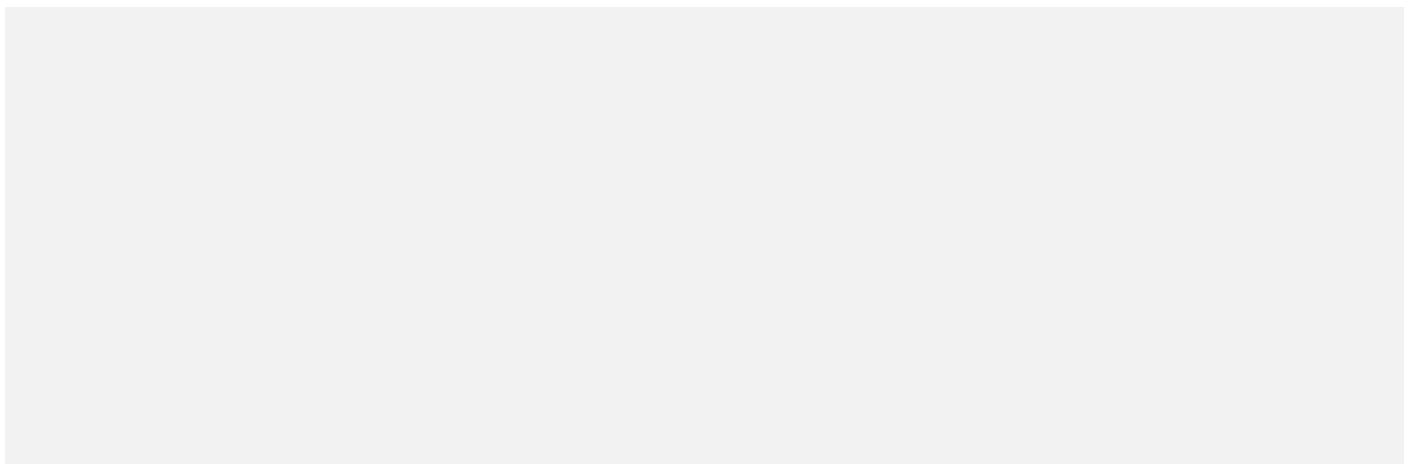


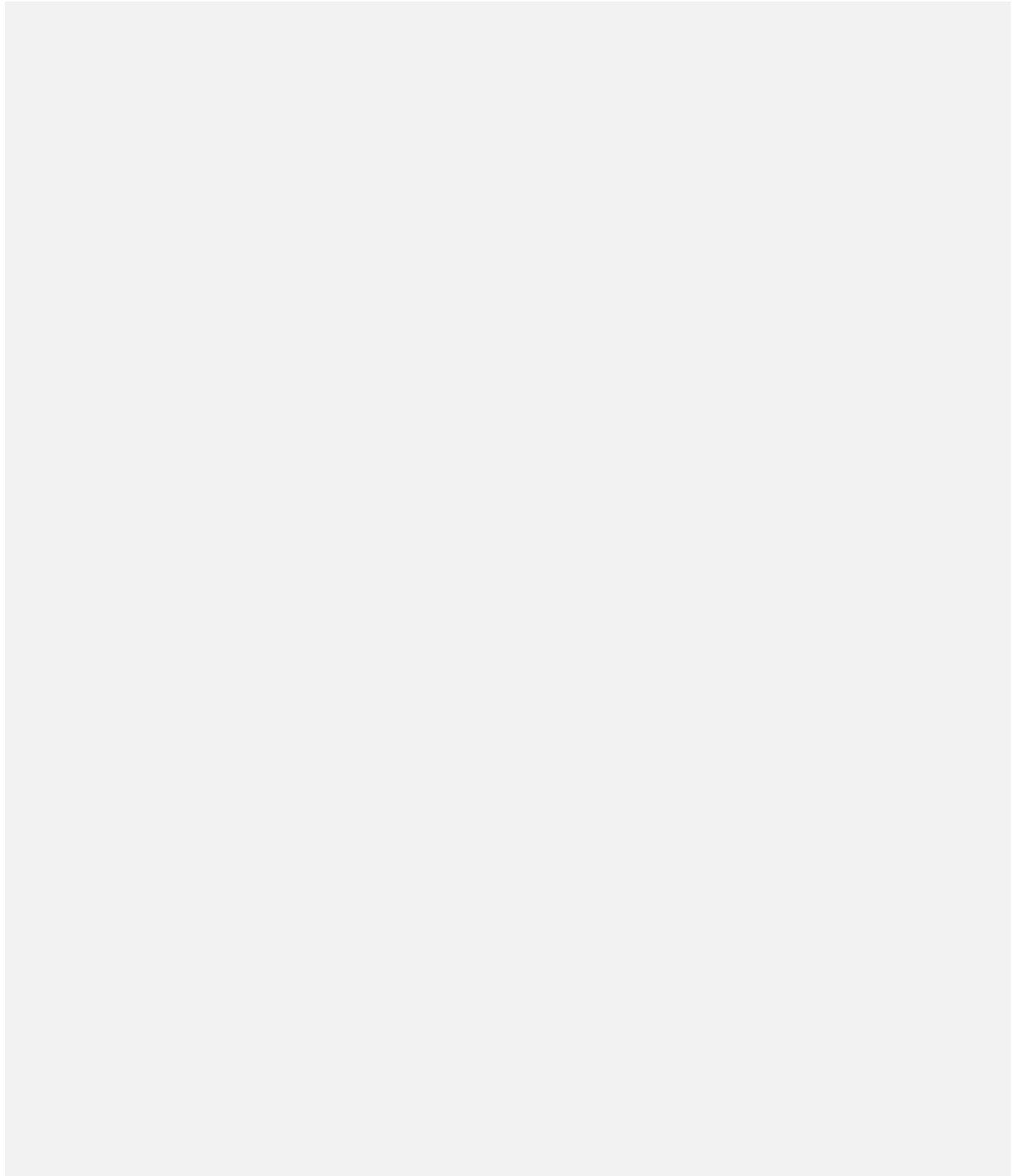
**Before:** Brick tones predominated in the master bedroom.



**Before:** There was an internal window between the bedroom and bathroom in the old scheme. "It was a little bit too open, let's just say," says Raj.

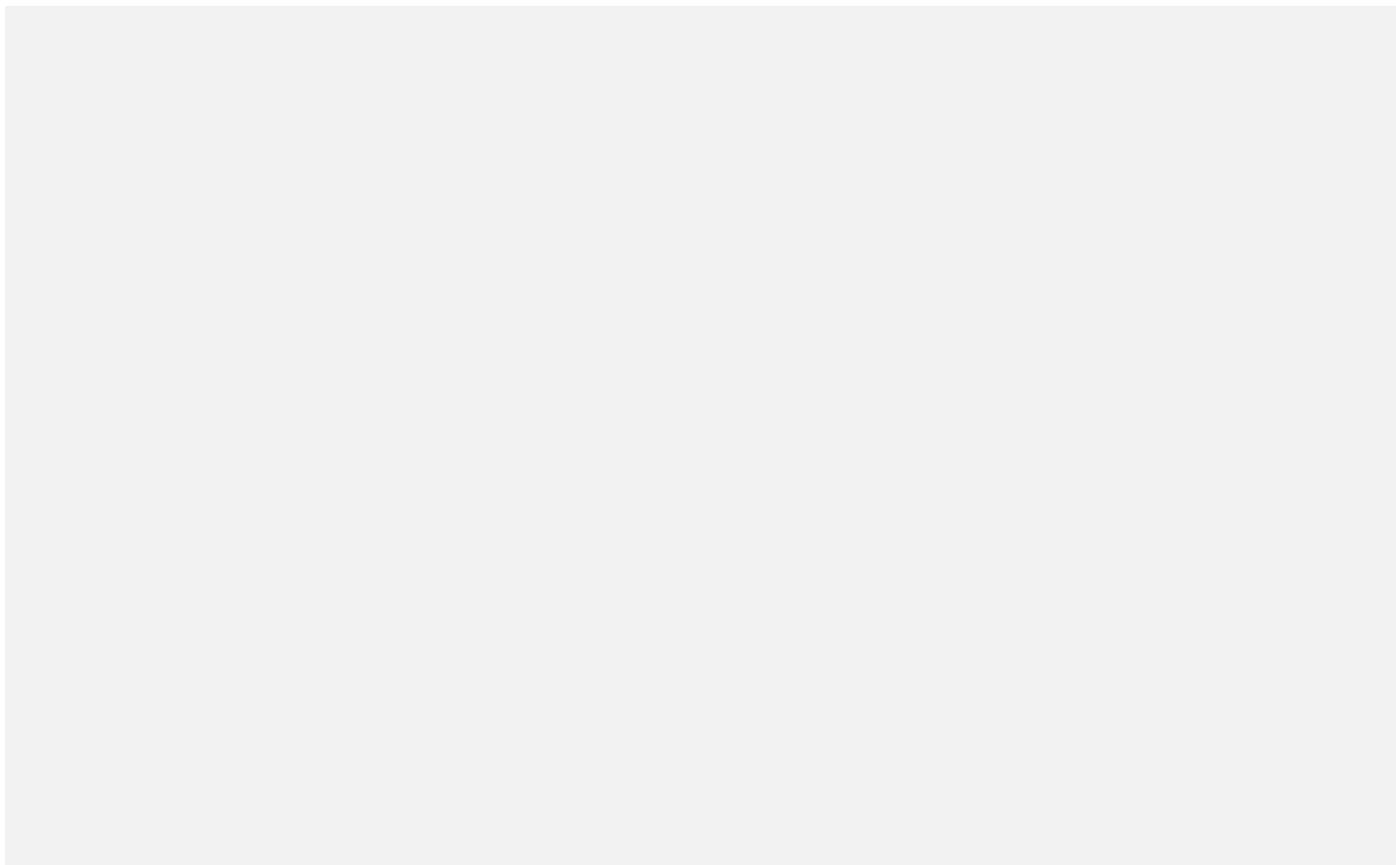
## **After: Master Suite**



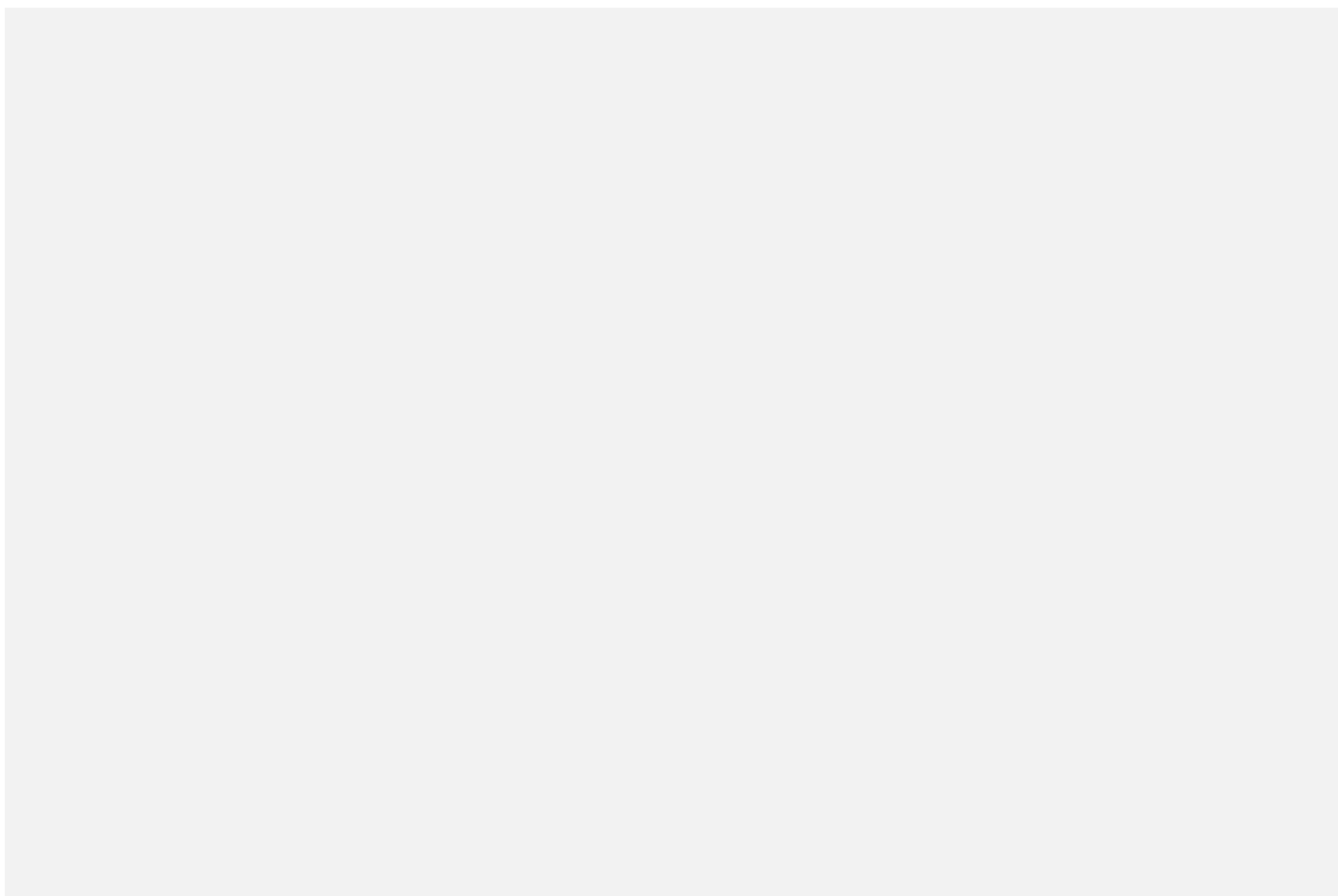


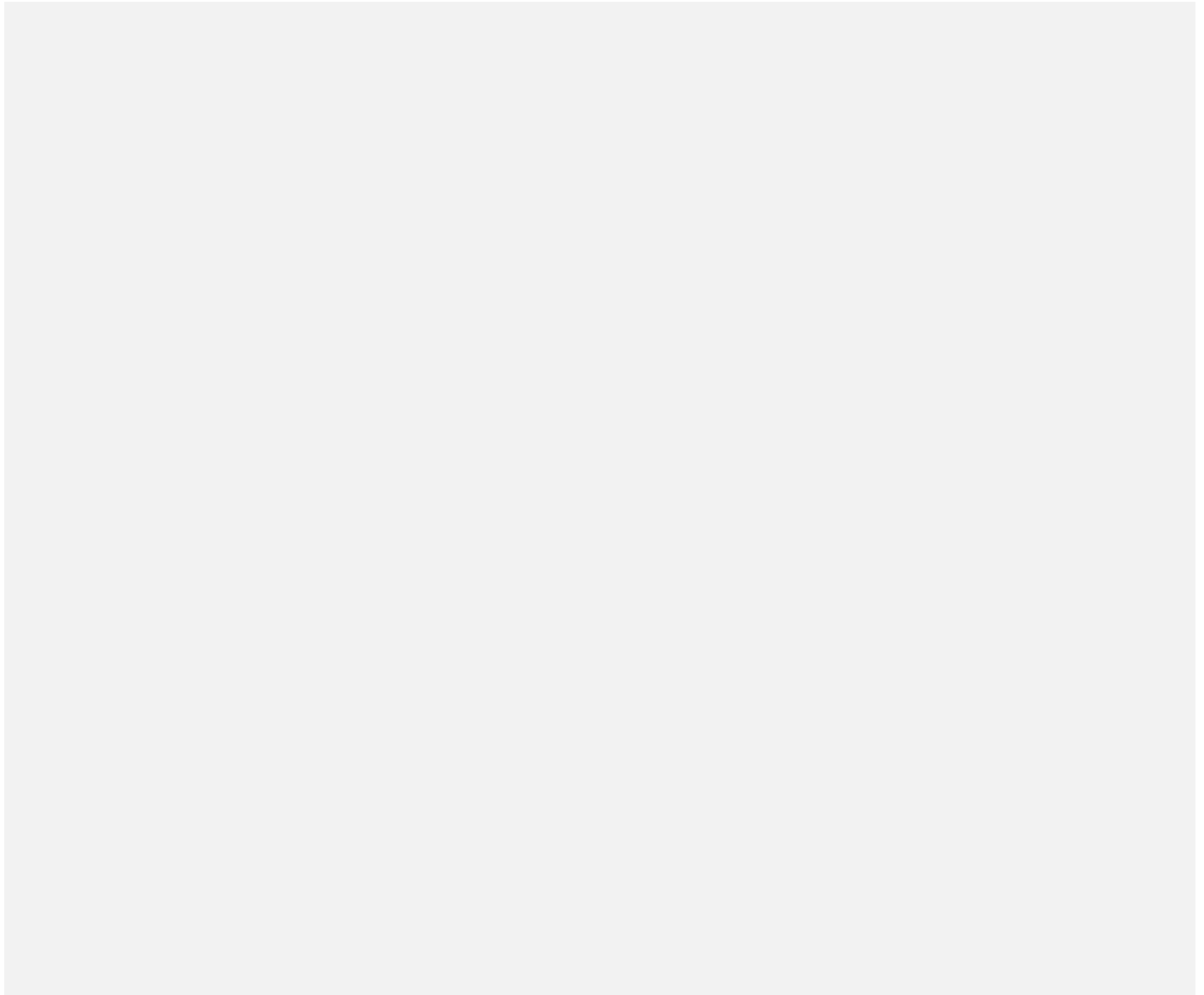
The brick was painted to create a more soothing backdrop for relaxing, while still maintaining the textural qualities. "We wanted to make the bedrooms sanctuaries where you can leave the bustle of the city and the High Line, and really feel comfortable," says Raj.



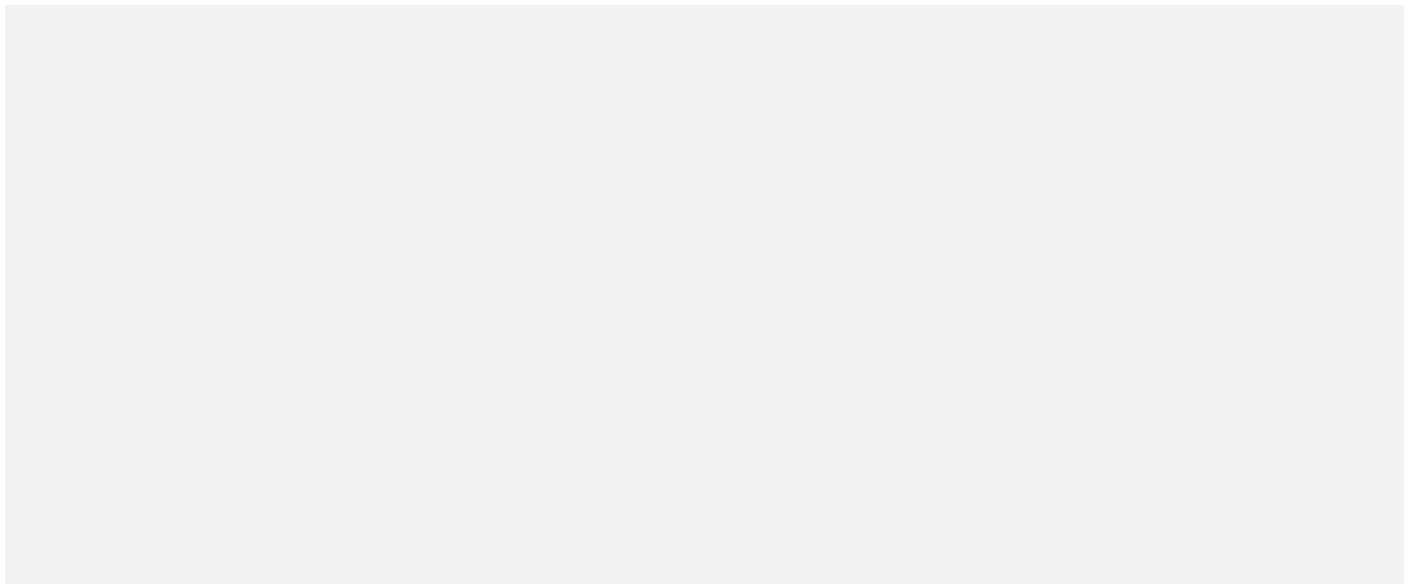


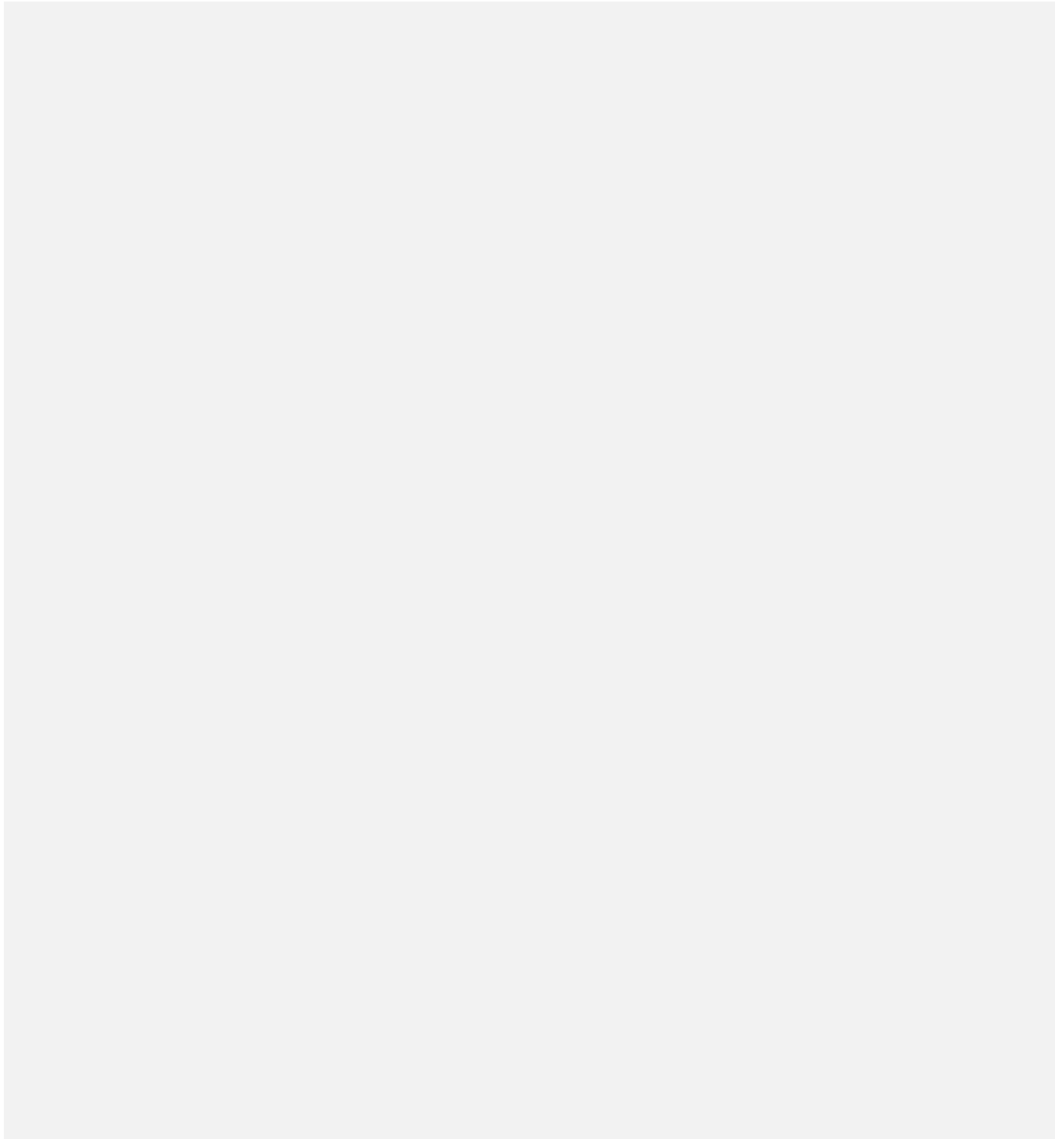
**The bathroom layout was reconfigured for more privacy, and wrapped in honed beige marble.**





The tub backdrop is composed of bamboo-cut textured marble tile. "When the lights are on, it casts a really beautiful waterfall effect of light across the texture," says Watts.





The upper portion of the walls were finished in waterproof tadelakt, which meets the marble slabs in a pleasing datum line carried around the entire room.

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**Project Credits:**

*Architects of Record: Ravi Raj, RARARA / @ravirajarchitect and Evan Watts, D&A Companies*

*Builder: Robertson-Tait*

*Lighting Design: Kugler Ning Lighting*

*Artwork Consultation: Uprise Art*

*MEP Engineer: ABS Engineering*

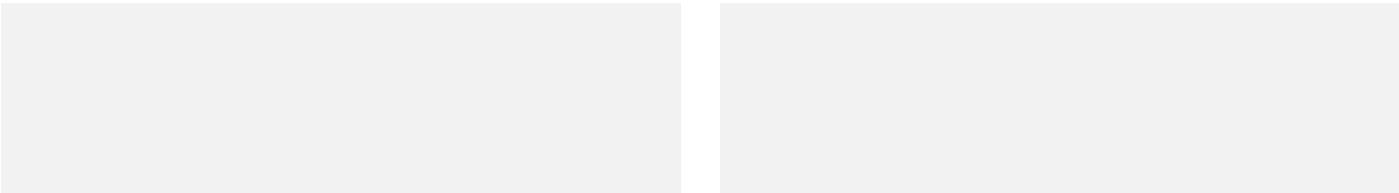
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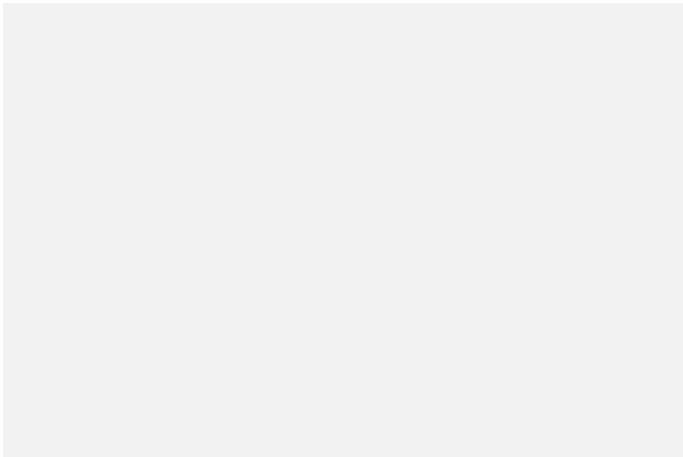


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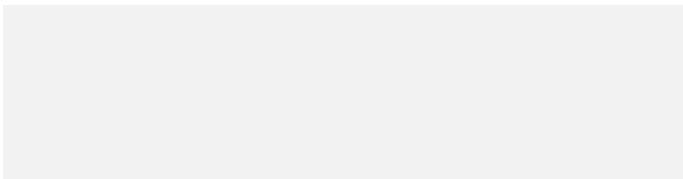
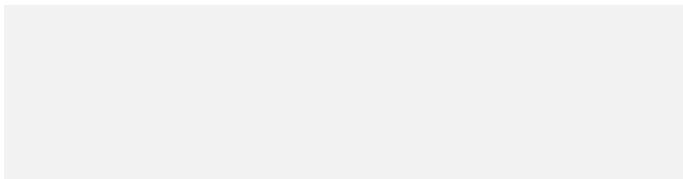


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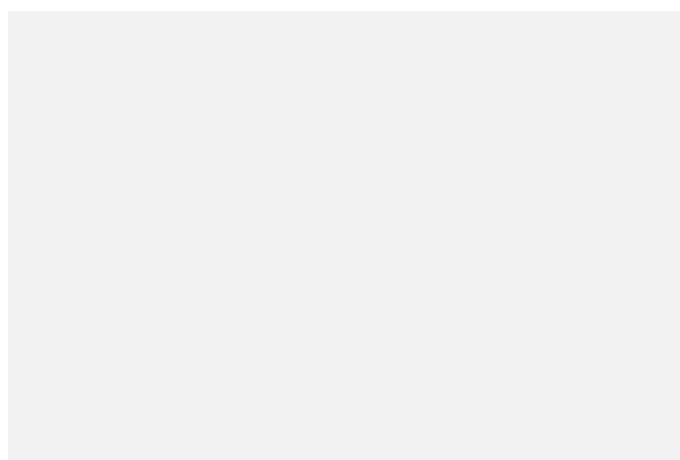


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