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Circa owner fills his loft with hundreds of 1940s pieces

An artist neighbor painted the vintage-inspired mural in the guest room of David Deatherage's loft. A white patent-leather roundabout picks up its curves, softening the room's hard edges. (Emily Rasinski/P-D)

By Amy Burger**SPECIAL TO THE POST-DISPATCH**

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Old Hollywood glamour meets modern industrialism in David Deatherage's ninth floor loft apartment in the hip Washington Avenue Art Lofts. Deatherage, co-owner of Circa modern art and furnishings in the Central West End, has filled his place with his vast personal collection of 1940s designer furniture featuring Art Deco and "Hollywood Regency" style — characterized by high-glamour, fluid lines and ornate details such as Lucite, crystal and mirrored accents. He says he has more than 100 pieces from the era.

The more formal look, reminiscent of old Hollywood hotels and mansions, creates a unique contrast to the white walls, epoxy white concrete floors and exposed metal ductwork of the industrial city loft space.

"I sort of envisioned the space like a 1940s Hollywood movie set," Deatherage says of the open loft, organized into smaller seating

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areas ideal for entertaining. Save for the curtains and flat-screen TV, nearly everything in this ultra modern space is from another era, yet it seems to belong so perfectly.

A former University of Missouri-Rolla engineering student, Deatherage began collecting 1940s furniture when he got his first house in Rolla. He started by combing estate sales and studying the popular designers of the time. He amassed a significant collection and eventually started a business selling high-end pieces online, mostly to interior designers on the coasts (a pair of chairs he sold to a New York designer ended up in the Hamptons home of musician Billy Joel). Deatherage partnered with local gallery owner William Shearburn to open Circa in May.

"Most of the furniture I sell at Circa is more mid-century modern and architectural style, but my personal taste is for the more decorative pieces of the 1940s," Deatherage says.

His loft looks like a 1940s designer showroom — the epitome of urban chic. Ornate pieces such as a pair of crystal beaded wall sconces by designer Tommi Parzinger, a white lacquer cabinet designed for the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco and a black lacquer sideboard by James Mont (whose clientele included Lana Turner, Bob Hope and famous mobsters Lucky Luciano and Frank Costello) are complemented with more sleek and modern pieces like a Philippe Starck Ghost Chair and a long, cream low-backed Baker sofa. The rough concrete floor is softened with a trio of white Greek Flokati rugs.

Deatherage's extensive collection of furniture and accessories includes sought-after pieces by a number of renowned mid-century designers such as Harvey Propper, Paul Frankl, Monteverde Young and Dorothy Draper, one of the first professional interior designers in the U.S., famous for her decorating of some of the era's most stylish hotels.

Each piece of furniture in his collection has its own unique history and evokes the sense of a bygone era. Sitting in the living room of this unique loft feels as if you could be sipping martinis with Rita Hayworth rather than sitting amid 21st century downtown St. Louis.

Deatherage even has some accent pieces with St. Louis ties. A pair of silver urns sitting atop white pedestals came from the historic downtown Jefferson Hotel, and a gilded tree sculpture was part of a display at Montaldo's, a high-end women's boutique that was one of the early tenants of Plaza Frontenac.

Those looking to soften the industrial look of a modern urban loft space can take cues from Deatherage's hip, retro style. The hard lines of the architecture and the stark white of the walls, ceiling and floor are balanced with softly curved furniture in rich chocolate browns with accents of turquoise. Silver-plated lamps and fixtures with ornate details offset the steel ductwork overhead.

Deatherage has created a lush, urban retreat that is at once comfortable, stylish and luxurious with an air of old Hollywood glamour.

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David Deatherage October 10, 2009 4:04AM CST

The muralist that painted the 25 x 11 foot mural in the photo shown in very talented Judy Krogstad.

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