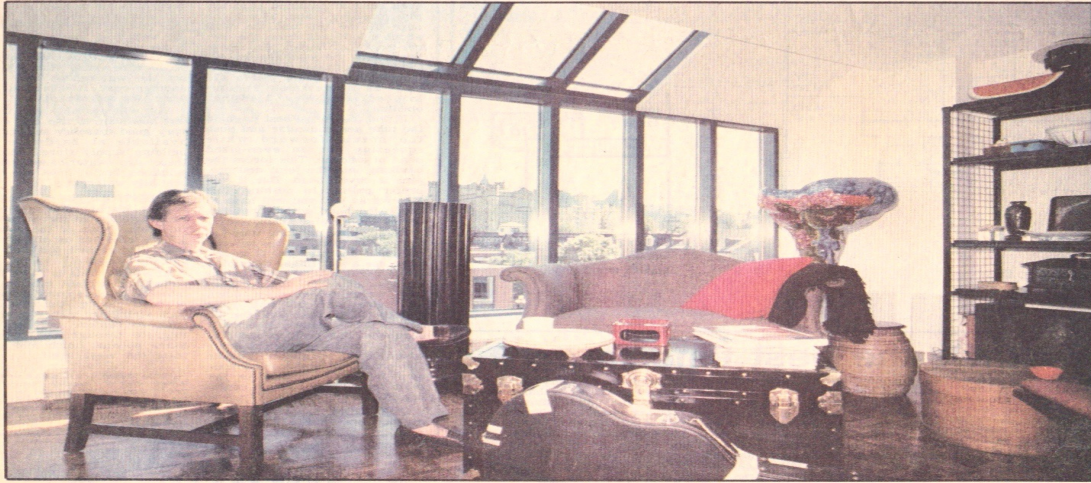


# Scaled-down living



**New look:** John Swain enjoys the view from his fifth-floor apartment in the heart of the Byward Market

—Drew Gragg, Citizen

## Apartment far cry from 3-storey house in the Glebe

By Margo Roston  
Citizen staff writer

John Swain calls it living in a garret; someone else might describe it as sitting on top of the world.

From his fifth-floor Murray Street apartment, in the heart of the Byward Market area, the casually-dressed interior designer looks out over a spectacular view of Major's Hill Park and Parliament Hill along with a montage of roof tops and the Byward Market.

"And after the sun sets on the Parliament Buildings, you can watch the hookers on the street," he laughs.

But it's a far cry from a three-storey house on Brown's Inlet in the Glebe to a 750-square-foot two-bedroom apartment; the move has been a big change of lifestyle for Swain, his wife Jacqueline, their two children Chris 24, and Niki, 19 and gray cat Mrs. Swain.

"But the kids are both off to college this fall," he notes.

The Swains sold their house and rented the upscale condo for one-year from a Canadian diplomat. The downtown move is sort of a trial, to see if they can live comfortably in a small space in a busy area of town.

"It's something we've been thinking of doing for quite a while," he admits, "and so far it has been a big success."

But the dramatic move meant paring down their belongings to the basics and packing up their "toys" as Swain, 44, calls the couple's eclectic collection of antiques and collectibles. Because their stay in the apartment is temporary, they didn't want to spend time and money on decorating. The idea was to simply take advantage of the good qualities of the space.

The former art student started much like a painter with a bare background, filling in the space as required. He first put a comfortable beige leather chair near the window of the living room so he could enjoy the view. Then he added a small



It wasn't a perfect move for the cat

table to put a book on, followed by a small sofa and a comfortable chair for guests.

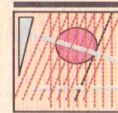
The Swains have no dining-room table in the open-concept living room/kitchen — two stools at a kitchen counter serve the purpose. "If we want a table there's a restaurant below," says Swain.

A \$79 steamer trunk serves as a coffee table, handy for storage as well. He worries that its life as a table will be short-lived.

"I know one of the kids will take it."

Admitting the view's the thing, he's left the green-frame front windows uncovered, and lined one wall with simple black metal shelving loaded with the couple's collection of objets d'art.

The shelves bulge with everything from a 17th-century Spanish travelling desk to a bronze English tea urn. (For several years, Swain owned an antique shop.) A large,



**DESIGNER HOMES**

colorful ceramic pot fills one corner of the room, while an antique easel with an unfinished portrait, faces the window.

A Chinese table inlaid with mother of pearl and a Japanese pot full of fresh flowers, along with a yellow Chinese vase and a modern yellow and white German silk screen serigraph, are a good example of the Swain style — an interesting mélange with plenty of his favorite color: bright, sunny yellow.

The master bedroom is lined with windows facing Notre-Dame Basilica, one of Swain's favorite buildings, and the gray stone Archbishop's Palace, with a side view of the National Gallery.

The view is all in a serene gray color except at night when the basilica is lit up. Swain simply attached black metal blinds to the windows, and added two comfortable chairs for outdoor or television watching and a queen-size Shaker-style bed.

"Because the bed is so high we can always put a piece of plywood on top of the mattress and use it as a dining room table," he jokes, his wry sense of humor once again apparent.

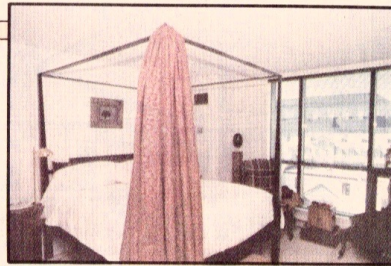
On one of the bed posts, he and Jacqueline have hung a huge antique paisley shawl, colored in shades of orange and beige, giving the room a warm and private look.

"Improvisation is the key," Swain, who in fact once designed for the theatre, is involved with commercial, home and exterior design.

Although Swain says "we're just camping here," he admits they like living downtown, close to work.

Design Source, his fabric outlet and interior-design office is on Dalhousie Street, while Jacqueline has only to walk to William Street where she is the manager of the Duvet Shop.

Downtown living is a different experience for the Swains but with a deft touch, their temporary home is bright and cheerful and relaxed. And it all seems to have been so easy to put together.



The open-concept living room and kitchen. The master bedroom has a warm and private look