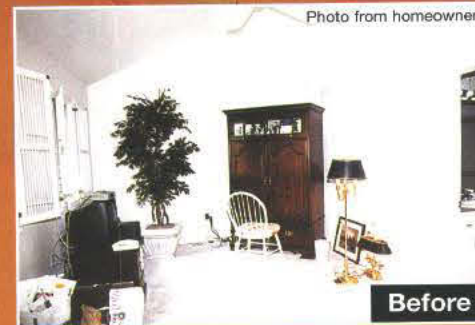
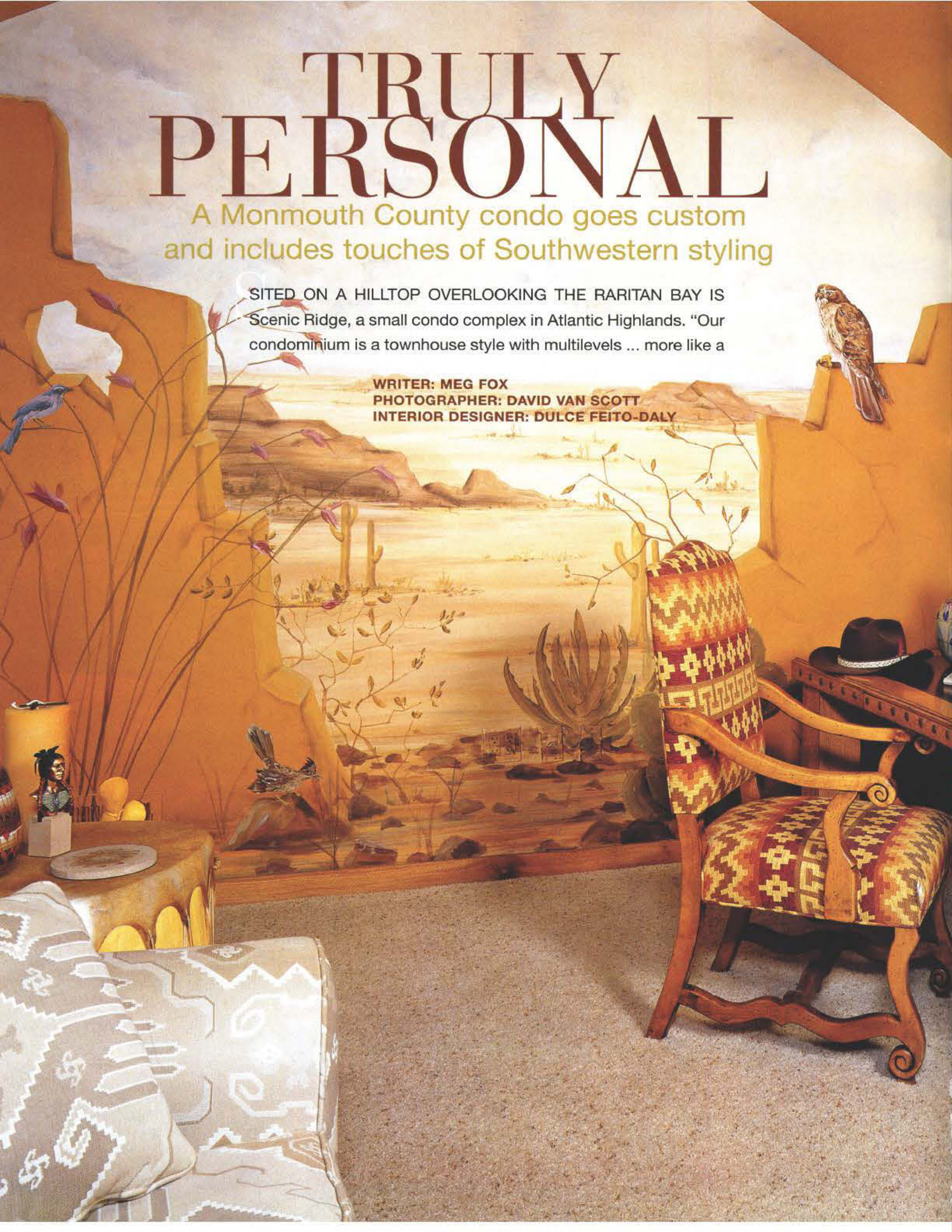


TRULY PERSONAL

A Monmouth County condo goes custom and includes touches of Southwestern styling

SITED ON A HILLTOP OVERLOOKING THE RARITAN BAY IS Scenic Ridge, a small condo complex in Atlantic Highlands. "Our condominium is a townhouse style with multilevels ... more like a

WRITER: MEG FOX
PHOTOGRAPHER: DAVID VAN SCOTT
INTERIOR DESIGNER: DULCE FEITO-DALY



THE DESERT-THEME MURAL (opposite) depicting cactuses, boulders, and wildlife opens up the den-office, artist Christine Corcoran says. **SOURCES:** mural, C.C. Studios in Oakhurst; desk, designed by Dulce Feito-Daly Interior Design in Shrewsbury and fabricated by Sebastian Woodworking in Howell; TV, Hitech Stereo in Eatontown.

■ This upstairs bedroom (before photo, inset) had been used as a catchall den. The space-hogging armoire housed bulky computer equipment.

■ Homeowner Gregg Evans' upbringing in California's Mojave Desert region led to the den-office's Southwestern theme. It's expressed in geometric prints, textured materials, and the step design of the upholstered window cornices (top). "The laminated shades were cut to simulate hides," and the textured carpet mimics sand, says the room's designer, Dulce Feito-Daly of Shrewsbury. **SOURCES:** pottery, Christopher Heede in Scottsdale, Arizona; log drum side tables, Taos Drums in Rancho de Taos, New Mexico.

■ The designer brought order to the den with a wall of built-ins (above) that contain bookshelves, clothing, entertainment equipment, and a mini-fridge. The cabinetry's diamond pattern is made up of rough-sawn, quarter-sawn oak, and tile insets. **SOURCES:** built-ins, designed by Dulce Feito-Daly Interior Design in Shrewsbury and fabricated by Architectural Cabinet Technology in Farmingdale.



THEMATIC ELEMENTS such as a stepped shower-door design and inlay tiles extend from the den into the adjacent bathroom (above). The luxurious shower took the place of a builder-grade fiberglass tub and shower unit. Terra-cotta floor tiles, arranged in a herringbone pattern, were cut to fit the room's small proportions. **SOURCES:** porcelain wall tile, Monmouth St. Tile in Red Bank; tile installation, Frank VanBrunt Custom Tile and Stone Installations in West Long Branch; cabinetry, Architectural Cabinet Technologies in Farmingdale.

■ The doorway to the bathroom (right), located off the den, continues the Southwestern motifs with faux-painted boots on the wall and an etched-glass desert scene in the custom door. The lower door panel is rift-cut oak. **SOURCES:** etched glass, Christopher Heede in Scottsdale, Arizona; door panel, Sebastian Woodworking in Howell; decorative painter, C.C. Studios in Oakhurst.



house than a condo-style apartment," said Donna Balon, who resides there with her husband, Gregg Evans.

Benefits associated with condo-style living suit the professional couple because they didn't want to deal with large-scale maintenance. "My husband had a big house on the water [in a nearby town], and he's been there, done that," said Balon, referring to the travails of mowing lawns and shoveling snow. She adds that their workday commute into Manhattan on the ferry is "wonderfully convenient."

Single during the mid-1990s, Balon purchased the then-new two-bedroom, 2½-bath unit. The rooms had ho-hum materials and little to no architectural embellishment. With assistance from Shrewsbury interior designer Dulce Feito-Daly, Balon addressed one room at a time, gradually ridding the home of many generic features. In the main living areas, for instance, hardwood strip flooring replaced wall-to-wall carpet and builder-grade tile; detailed millwork enriched walls and doorways.

SHOWER SUPREME

Other spaces, such as a basic master bath, received a complete overhaul. "We wanted to create an elegant bathroom with European features ... and a feminine flair," said the designer, whose firm is Dulce Feito-Daly Interior Design Inc. By removing a small fiberglass shower-tub configuration, clumsy partition wall, and tiny closet, the designer delivered on Balon's wish: a large glass-enclosed shower. Plain white-laminate cabinets gave way to hand-painted cabinetry "designed to look like furniture, with raised legs," Feito-Daly said.

By 1999, when Balon and Evans married and made the condo their home, only a few rooms remained untouched: the kitchen, an upstairs bedroom-den, and an adjacent bathroom. But that was a temporary state.

"We didn't want to live with the

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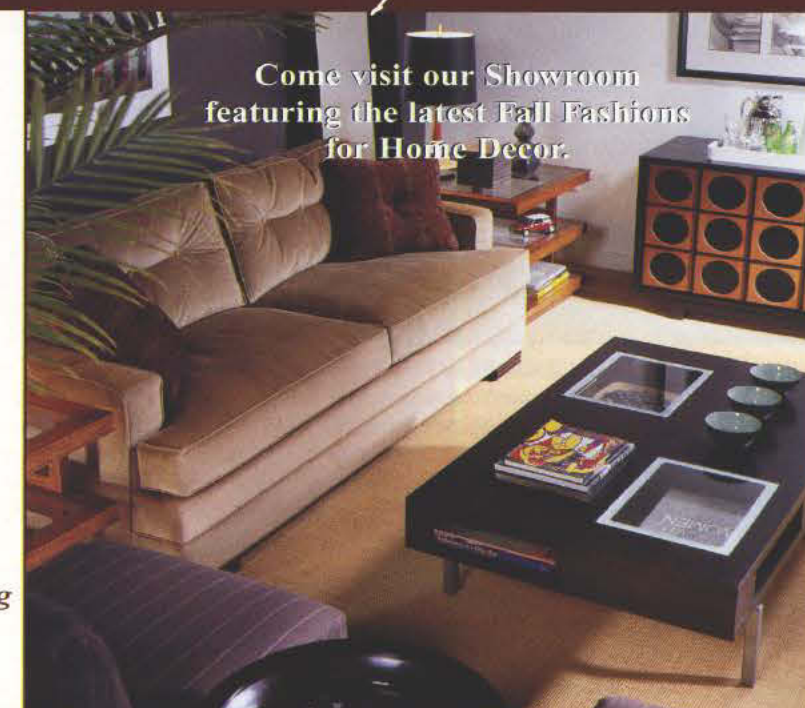
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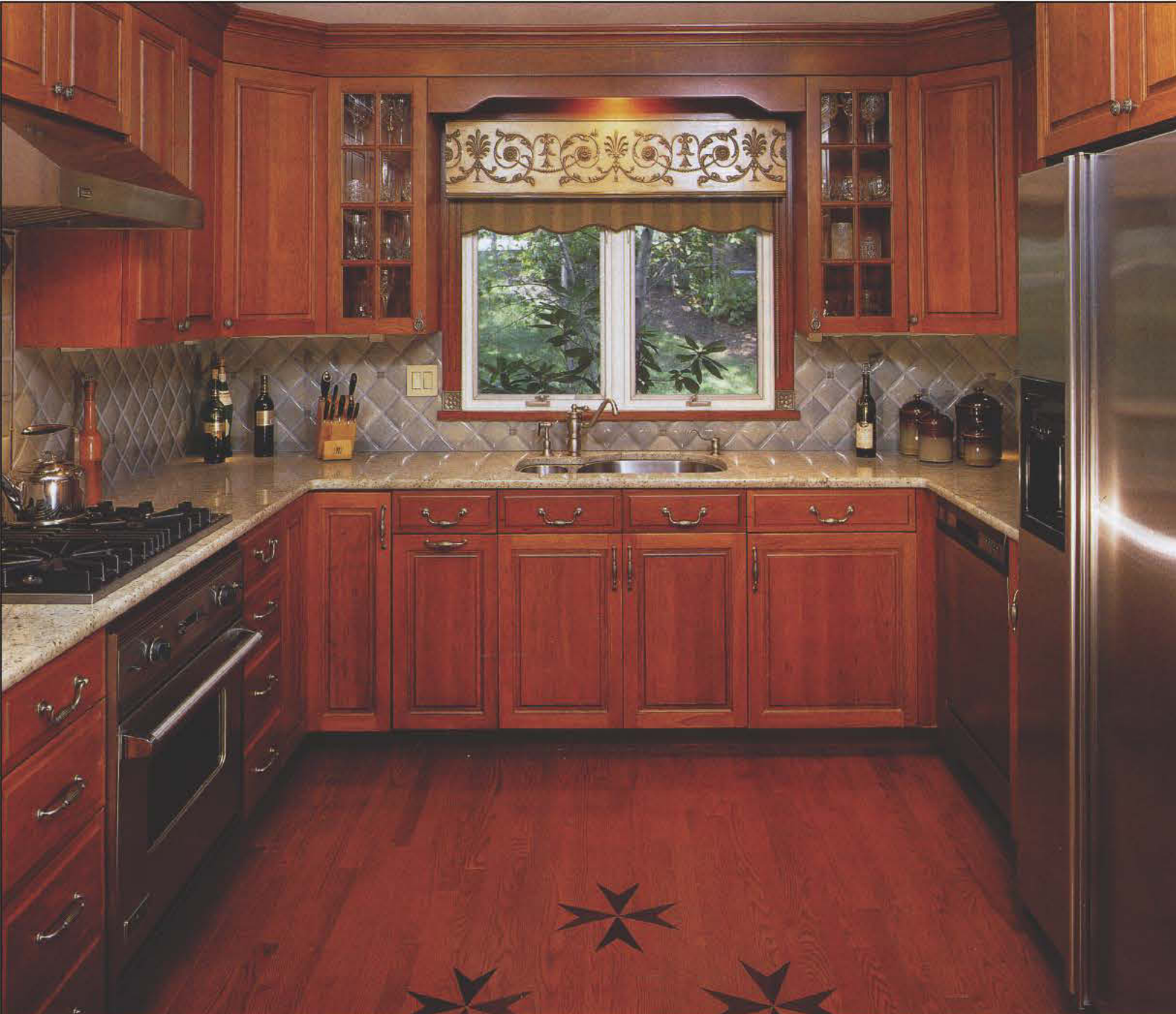


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THE REMODELED KITCHEN (above) has cherry cabinetry, stainless-steel appliances, and marble countertops. Warm cherry flooring replaces cold white tile; the inlay star pattern reappears in other areas of the home. The former eating area allows the room to accommodate a wide fridge as well as more counter and storage space. **SOURCES:** cabinetry, Architectural Cabinet Technologies in Farmingdale; sink, Franke; GE Profile refrigerator and Viking hood, cooktop, and oven, Better Housekeeping Shop in Red Bank; pillow-tile backsplash, Ann Sacks Tile & Stone in New York City; White Cashmere granite countertop, All Granite and Marble in Ridgefield Park.

■ Generic cabinetry, laminate countertops, and standard appliances made the original space (right) a “classic condo kitchen,” homeowner Donna Balon says. The too-tight eating area — now gone — held only two people while consuming valuable wall space.



Before

Photo from homeowner

builder's choices knowing we would live here for at least a decade,” Balon recalled. In redoing those areas, the homeowner again solicited help from Feito-Daly, this time with lots of input from Evans.

“So much of the home was me,” Balon said of the rooms furnished with mainstream-traditional furniture, artwork, and accessories. “I wanted Gregg to feel this was his home, too.”

As a result, Balon's next remodeling goal was a kitchen worthy of his culinary talents. “Gregg is a great cook.” She described the original space as “very much a classic condo kitchen,” with standard appliances, generic cabinetry, lackluster laminate countertops, and hard-on-your-feet white ceramic-tile flooring.

KITCHEN REVISIONS

To improve the kitchen's function and aesthetics, the designer opted to reconfigure its layout. “Small kitchens can still have all the features of a larger kitchen,” Feito-Daly said. “The key is the utilization of space.”

One critical change: Feito-Daly removed an eat-in area that could seat only two people but ate up precious wall space; the freed-up wall now accommodates a sizable refrigerator as well as a run of new cabinetry and counters.

The designer also widened the passageway from the kitchen to the dining room by one foot to enhance the flow and visual link between the two rooms. Balon and Evans use the dining room every day, and they find that entertaining is easier at a table that comfortably seats eight, the designer said.

Completed in 2000, the kitchen has high-end stainless-steel appliances, cherry cabinetry, and rollout shelves. The cabinetry, combined with other features such as crown molding and cherry floors, helped elevate the kitchen's status. “It trans-

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THE REMODELED MASTER BATH (above and right) has a larger shower and furniture-like cabinetry with a "feminine flair," designer Dulce Feito-Daly says. A subtle scroll design painted by artist Christine Corcoran accents the hand-painted cabinets and make-up shelf. **SOURCES:** Jerusalem Gold tumbled stone on floor and in shower, Monmouth St. Tile in Red Bank; stool, Emerson et Cie in High Point, North Carolina; Emperador marble countertops, All Granite and Marble in Ridgefield Park; shower fixtures, Kitchen & Bath Works in Shrewsbury.

■ The original master bath (left) suffered from a poor layout, uninspired materials, and a tiny linen closet that concealed plumbing.



formed our condo into a home," Balon said.

Next, the renovations progressed to Evans' den-office space. He grew up in the Mojave Desert region of California, so he felt at home with a Southwestern design scheme for that room. "We thought we could have some fun with the theme," Balon said.

"We planned to do it in early fall 2001," Balon said. Then came September 11.

From her office across from the World Trade Center, Balon said she "was on the phone that day with Dulce at 8:30 in the morning" reviewing the plans. Evans was also working in the vicinity.

"After the attack, I was almost afraid to do anything," Balon said. Designing a theme room seemed so trivial. Eventually the couple decided to move forward with their original plans in part because of commitments to contractors.

SEEING THE PROGRESS

Until her New York City office could be relocated, Balon worked three months from home. During that time, she watched as Feito-Daly and contractors transformed the disheveled den into a Southwestern-style retreat for her husband.

After the first coat of burnt-orange paint went on the walls, Balon became a tad uneasy. "I felt like I was in a cartoon. ... It was so bright. I called Dulce and said, 'I think you better come over here.'" Balon and Evans grew to appreciate the palette once the final coat was applied and the furnishings were in place.

A focal-point mural, painted by Oakhurst artist Christine Corcoran, now takes the spotlight. Its trompe l'oeil desert-theme depicts mountains, cactuses, and creatures indigenous to the area: a roadrunner, hawk, and lizard, for instance. "The mural takes on a life of its own," Corcoran said. "We even named the

hawk [sitting on a wall in the mural] Baltazar," she said with a laugh.

Staples of Southwestern décor — geometric prints and highly textured furnishings — impart a rustic flavor to the room. Laminated shades were cut to simulate hides, the designer said, and the new "textured and speckled carpet looks like sand." Authentic pieces evocative of the

Southwest also occupy the space: pottery from Arizona artist Christopher Heede and traditional Taos, New Mexico, pueblo log drums that serve as unique end tables.

Feito-Daly commissioned a local carpenter to build Evans a Southwestern-influenced wood desk with nailhead trim. The desk replaced a bulky armoire that housed a large computer monitor. Balon said her



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Photo from homeowner



SCENIC RIDGE condominiums sit on six acres of Atlantic Highlands property with Raritan Bay views. Donna Balon and Gregg Evans occupy one of the 24 units.

husband was never comfortable using the armoire's flip-down countertop as a workspace. A space-saving wall-mounted plasma TV also freed up room for a comfortable twin sleeper sofa.

The former catchall den now has a row of built-in cabinetry that stores clothing, entertainment equipment, books, and a mini-refrigerator. The cabinetry — constructed of rough-sawn, quarter-sawn white oak with inlay tiles — provides the distressed, weathered feel the designer and homeowners envisioned. "It's a work of art," Balon said.

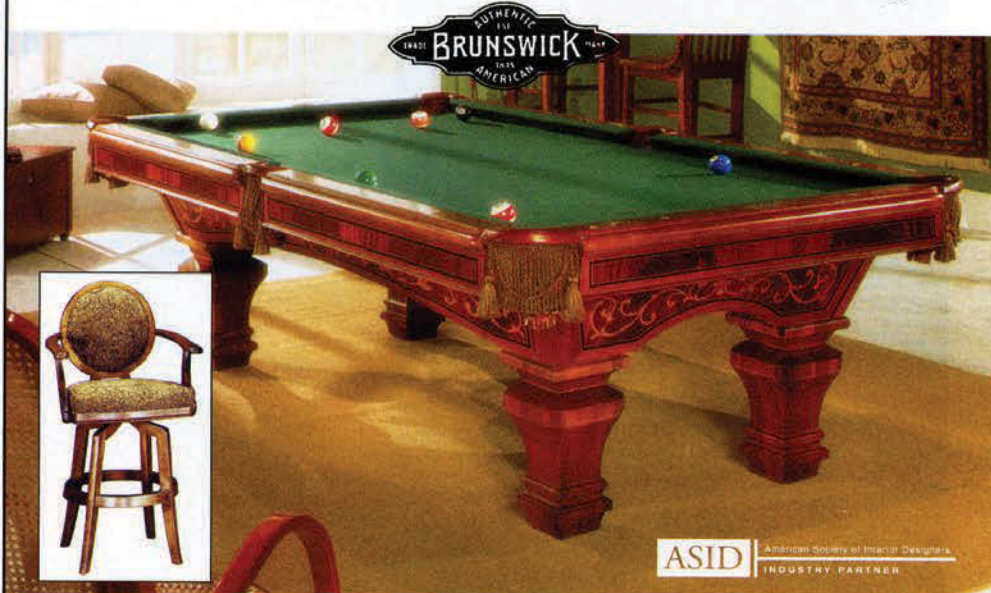
BATHROOM DETAILS

The Southwestern deco tiles embedded in the den's built-in cabinetry repeat as accents in the adjacent bath. The remodeled bathroom has all the latest amenities and features: body sprays, a must-have rain shower head, and a roomy shower encased in glass and floor-to-ceiling tile. And it shows the same Southwestern flair as the den.

Despite her initial trepidation before the den and bathroom remodel, Balon has no regrets. "I'm glad we did it. Life went on ... and we are really enjoying it." ■

Shopping information, Page 220

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