

CITY SLICK

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Swapping their traditional family house in the suburbs for a chic, contemporary urban condominium gives a pair of empty nesters an easy new lease on life.



Twin seating areas, tiered ceiling coffers, and soft corner drapes give the expansive living room the warmth and intimacy of a smaller space. Mica panels in the chandelier add sparkle to the room's quiet palette.

Vellum inserts add a hint of shimmer to a game table in a corner of the living room. **FACING PAGE, TOP:** The family pooches, Sassy, Daisy, and Teddy, frolic on the artificial grass of the long terrace. **FACING PAGE, BOTTOM:** Mirror-mounted sconces with crystal sprays set the entry's glamorous tone.



Daisy loves Boston.

There's nothing quite so exciting as a walk along Newbury Street, checking out the colorful displays in shop windows. And then there's the variety of intriguing scents and sounds! After a lifetime in the suburbs, the black-and-white Shih Tzu has discovered that, at heart, she's a city girl.

Her owners feel much the same way. Their large suburban house had been perfect for raising a family, and the wife had enjoyed the process of dressing it in English-cottage style. But then the children grew up, and the couple no longer needed an eighteen-room house with formal living and dining rooms. And heaven knows no one wanted the bother of keeping a dozen bathrooms clean.

Downsizing and simplifying sounded like a good idea. Giving up luxury, comfort, and style? Not so much. Their new home—a condominium high in the Mandarin Oriental in Boston's Back Bay—strikes the precise balance they wanted.

At about 6,100 square feet, the unit is hardly diminutive. "We made no sacrifices with respect to the space, to the size of the rooms," the wife says. "It feels like a house, not a condo."

That the space is also lovely and exudes warmth speaks to the trusting relationship between the wife and her designer, Leslie Fine. While the homeowner had loved the more exuberant style of her previous home, she was ready for a new approach. "We had a very cozy home, but I didn't think the style would translate well to city living," she explains.

The palette throughout the home consists of a multitude of shades of gray accented with a range of purples, from lavender to plum.



A field of porcelain tile edged and accented with stainless-steel strips stands in for a rug beneath the dining table. **FACING PAGE, TOP:** A Dakota Jackson desk with a leather top protected by glass anchors the husband's office. The good-looking kitchen is outfitted in Macassar ebony cabinets with stainless-steel trim; the dining counter overlooks the dining room.

"Like many of my clients who move from suburban homes to the city, their house was beautiful, but very traditional, very accessorized, with lots of patterns and colors and fabric and layers," Fine says. "They wanted their urban home to be contemporary and clean-lined, but also warm and inviting."

The designer saw the potential in the unit, which, despite its well-designed floor plan and high-quality construction, was rather featureless when it came to details like millwork, moldings, cabinetry, and fixtures. After stripping away the existing millwork, Fine gave the space new depth and interest with custom-designed embellishments from top to bottom.

If, as Fine says, "a foyer foretells the rest of the space," this one predicts effortless glamour. Everything shines, beginning with the high-gloss front door that opens onto the polished-stone floor in white and shades of gray. White gold-leafed sconces sporting sprays of crystal orbs hang directly on the tall mirrors that flank the wide opening to the living room. A drum-shaded chandelier with crystal balls at the bottom adds even more sparkle. There's a real dose of drama here, but Fine stopped short of theatrics, not wanting to upstage the unit's true star—the panoramic cityscape served up by the floor-to-ceiling windows of the living room straight ahead.

Architectural detail, lighting, furniture placement, and texture all bring intimacy to the vast living room. A rim of lighting tucked between double soffits

casts a soft glow onto side-by-side sitting areas. The arrangements mirror each other with their large sofas upholstered in silvery Ultrasuede, each with a chaise piece on one end, and cocktail tables that double as ottomans. Fine covered the ottomans in a snake skin-textured vinyl. "I love using vinyls," she says. "They're made so beautifully now: soft, practical, and durable."

Steel-based chairs covered in soft, purplish-gray wool swivel to face the sofas (and the view) or to contemplate the fireplace, with its contemporary surround of stainless steel.

The palette—subdued here as it is throughout the home—consists of a multitude of shades of gray accented with a range of purples, from lavender to plum.

Neither Fine nor her clients wanted to hide the



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Designer Leslie Fine gave the master suite luxurious touches like the bed wall upholstered in suede and a plush tete-a-tete chaise. TOP RIGHT: The glossy Dakota Jackson table in the hall outside the master suite has a floating glass top and leather-front drawers. BOTTOM RIGHT: The wife's bathtub nestles against a wall that wears a mosaic mother-of-pearl.

views, so treatments on the tall windows consist only of motorized shades with a sheer panel to soften glare and a dark panel for more total privacy.

Fine faced her biggest challenge at the room's corners, where the walls jag in and out, forming a series of vertical edges that felt a bit too sharp and cold. She solved the problem by designing the lower soffit to follow the shape, then hanging stationary draperies in a soft, sheer fabric in stripes from almost-white to dark gray. "Without them, the corners would be empty and the room cold," she explains. "This creates a soft presence, a corner column of fabric that feels like an architectural detail."

Above the sitting area, Fine installed a dramatic chandelier with mica accents. "When it's off, it's beautiful," she says. "When it's on, it's stunning."

The unit's floors of dark oak inspired Fine's design for the dining room, where a stainless-steel fireplace is surrounded by dark oak paneling installed horizontally and inset with strips of stainless steel. In lieu of a rug, the glass-topped, stainless-steel-based dining table sits on a field of porcelain tile with a stainless-steel look, rimmed and accented with strips of stainless steel. Nearby, a bar paneled in oak and stainless steel gets sparkle from twin, horizontally set "stripes" of mirror.

For formal dining, the homeowners can hide the spacious kitchen by closing a set of pocket doors that match the mirrored paneling of the bar area. A kitchen as gorgeous as this one, however, with its Macassar ebony cabinets standing in contrast to white floors and countertops, deserves to be seen. The installation, by Herrick & White of Cumberland,

Rhode Island, took months, Fine says. "It was so intricate, so detailed. It's just magnificent."

Away from the public areas, Fine fulfilled her clients' wish list with offices for both husband and wife, two guest bedrooms, and a master suite with luxurious baths for each spouse.

As far as Daisy is concerned, the best feature of their new home is the terrace that runs the length of the dining room. Here, she and her companions—Teddy, a beige Shih Tzu, and tiny, two-pound Sassy, a teacup poodle—can frolic on pet-friendly synthetic grass that looks like the real thing.

The wife says Teddy and Sassy prefer the terrace to Newbury Street. But she and her husband, like Daisy, have found a true home in the city. •

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