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May/June 2010

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MAJOR DETAILS

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The once-bare walls of the living room now sport finely detailed millwork, and an ornate cast-limestone fireplace replaced a featureless box with a plain black surround. The parquet floors are original to the room.



Major Details

In a makeover that's nothing short of amazing, a featureless condo on the North Shore of Massachusetts becomes a gracious home with Continental chic. TEXT BY PAULA M. BODAH • PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAURA MOSS • ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN: JOHN KELSEY, WILSON KELSEY DESIGN • INTERIOR DESIGN: SALLY WILSON, WILSON KELSEY DESIGN • PRODUCED BY STACY KUNSTEL

Designer Sally Wilson papered one wall of the dining area to differentiate the space from the living room. *Right:* John Kelsey introduced the fluted columns to create some separation between the dining and seating areas. *Below:* New china closets, with a bronze-gilt shell design inside, look like they've been in here for a century.



Only a master of understatement would use the term *renovation* to describe what went on within the thick brick walls of this old building. Homeowners Cheryl and Richard Durgan and the design pros they worked with—the husband-and-wife team of John Kelsey and Sally Wilson of Wilson Kelsey Design in Salem, Massachusetts—would agree that the word *transformation* draws a far more accurate picture.

The 1907 structure on the North Shore of Massachusetts had an impressive enough beginning



as the stable and carriage house for a large estate. Eventually, though, the land was sold off in bits and pieces, and the building was divvied up to form three condominiums.

It was the center unit that Cheryl Durgan fell for six years ago when she was seeking a replacement for the large house she and Richard shared with their then-teenage son, Jared. The desire to downsize sprang from a transformation of sorts in their own lives, Cheryl says. Richard had faced a serious health issue, and now that he was well again the family had new priorities. “I wanted to *live*, as opposed to taking care of a home all the

time,” Cheryl says. “I said, ‘Life has changed, and we have to appreciate every day as a gift.’”

Richard, she acknowledges, wasn’t so sure about this particular change. “I saw such potential. I had such visions,” Cheryl says about the space. “My husband walked in and said, ‘You’ve got to be kidding.’”

One can hardly blame him for his skepticism. The 1980s renovation that created the condos had focused on utility, not beauty. “Close your eyes and picture class-C office space,” says Kelsey. “I mean literally—vinyl baseboards, commercial-grade materials. It felt like an old office building.”

On the lucky side, though, the thriftiness of the renovation meant that the space had retained its original grand scale. “The proportions of the rooms were absolutely delightful,” Kelsey says. “It still had its ten-foot-high ceilings. That helped, ultimately, in how graceful the design ended up.”

Still, Wilson adds, the team had their work cut out for them. “It was clear that every single room was going to have to be transformed in a major way—architecture, detailing, interior design, lighting, furnishings, fabric, window treatments.”

The very plainness of the space was like a blank screen onto which Cheryl could project her

The back patio looks out over a lush landscape. *Facing page clockwise from top:* The back of the building—originally the front entrance to the stable—and one side wear their original gold-colored brick. A medallion graces the wall that faces the patio. A fountain that the Durgans found on an antiquing trip sparked the landscaping plan.



vision for rooms that would ensconce the family in Continental elegance. Where a plain fireplace sat in the living room, she saw a limestone surround with ornate details stretching up to the ceiling. Where track lighting cast a commercial glare, she imagined crystal chandeliers hanging from plaster ceiling medallions.

The reworking began with Kelsey's focus on the interior architecture of the forty-foot-long living/dining room space. He introduced a pair of fluted columns that, he says, "give the dining and living areas their own sense of place and scale without physically separating them." He crowned the walls with ornate moldings and added decorative panels and a chair rail for further interest. A custom Tartaruga fireplace in cast limestone replaced the plain-Jane version, and the new ceiling sports plaster medallions from which hang bronze and crystal chandeliers.

In the dining room, Kelsey devised an elegant solution to a mundane problem; as a former sta-

ble with no basement, the house has limited storage options despite its fairly sizable footprint (the center unit the Durgans occupy is around 5,600 square feet). Kelsey combined beauty and utility in the matching china cupboards he designed.

For the color scheme, Wilson began with Landry & Arcari rugs the Durgans already owned, in soft earth and jewel tones. Three custom colors—ivory, a beige with hints of yellow ochre and another neutral with overtones of green and brown—cover the walls and trim. Cheryl and Richard brought a few pieces of furniture with them, including the dining table, a buffet and the daybed that stands between the living and dining areas. Wilson added pieces that have subtle variations in style to create a whole that feels timeless. An armless lounge chair has a simple, contemporary look, for example, while the striped armchair next to it would look right at home in a Paris palace. "I like that juxtaposition

of styles," Wilson says. "The pieces fit well together because each is in its own way ornate yet simple; elegant in proportion and beautiful in itself. They're like best friends—they have their own personalities, yet they can all mingle well."

What was once a kitchen/den combination was gutted and reworked into a spacious kitchen with two islands and a casual dining area. Brick veneer on two walls mimics the thick brick walls revealed during demolition. Kelsey added ceiling beams and custom cabinetry to give the kitchen an Old World country ambience. In the dining area, a custom table cozies up to a curved banquette that nestles into more custom cabinetry.

The five-and-a-half acres that surround the house held their own appeal for Cheryl. Working with Wilson and landscape designer David Hayes



of Beverly, Massachusetts, she is transforming the space behind her unit into an oasis of serenity with terraces, a fountain and a plethora of perennials and annuals. "I don't have to go anywhere in the fall; my leaf-peeping is out back!" she says.

Outside and in, there is still work to be done. The second floor, where her son's bedroom sits, is undergoing some changes now that Jared is off to college. His large bedroom and small study will become a small bedroom and a media room for when his friends come to visit. "In my previous house, I decorated all at once," Cheryl says. "Here, I wanted to do each room one at a time and fall in love with it."

The couple have, indeed, fallen in love with their home.

"We travel a lot and we have wonderful experiences, but we're always happy to walk in our front door," Cheryl says. "Our house puts its arms around us and tells us we're home." •

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Ceiling beams, exposed brick and custom cabinetry give the kitchen its European country look. Facing page clockwise from far left: Custom-designed millwork adds opulence to the master bath. The kitchen's casual dining area includes a cozy curved banquette. In contrast to the neutrals elsewhere in the house, a guest room glows in persimmon and gold.