

New England Home

CELEBRATING FINE DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2008

HIGH-RISE LUXURY FINE ART, FINE LIVING SPECTACULAR CITY VIEWS

PLUS *POLAR EXPRESS* AUTHOR CHRIS
VAN ALLSBURG'S PROVIDENCE HOME

NATURAL GIFTS

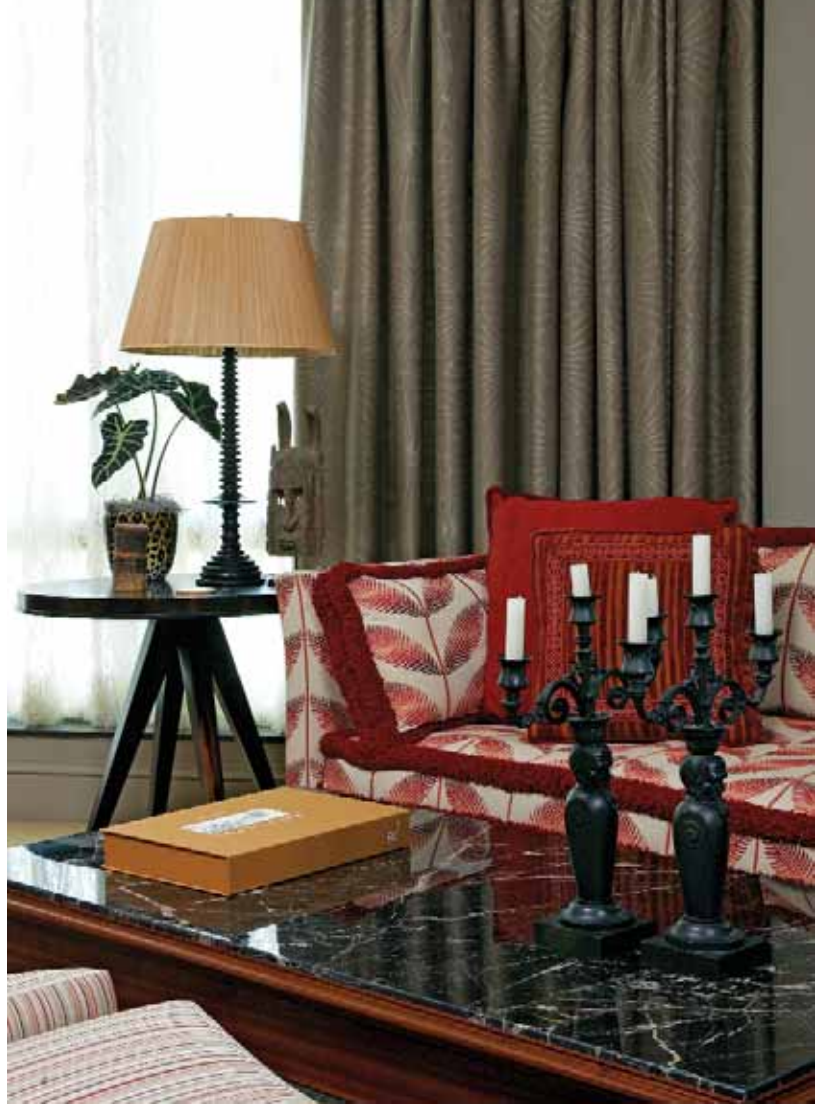
A sophisticated Boston penthouse looks out on an urban setting, but within, the colors and textures of the natural world prevail.

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Providence sculptor Ben Watkins created the starry screen separating the penthouse elevator and the living room. Architect Boyd Rourke chose materials that help bring the natural world into the city space.





NATURAL GIFTS

A sophisticated Boston penthouse looks out on an urban setting, but within, the colors and textures of the natural world prevail.

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interior architecture and design: boyd rourke, brinc. design

They call him Egg. At least the stable boys do, nicknaming the horse for his reputation as a jumper who's remarkably "over easy." When his owner rides him at shows, however, the imperial beast is no longer just plain Egg—officially, he's Napoleon, and he's clearly something special. | Taking her Napoleon (aka Egg) breathtakingly skyward, making things appear impossibly "over easy" to the





Subtle layers of pattern and texture in natural fabrics create an enveloping warmth in the lofty space. For the palette, Rourke says he “pulled the colors out of the sky.”



awestruck crowd, the rider strikes one as having the makings of an ideal design client. It's hard to imagine a professional would face huge hurdles in teaching her the cardinal virtues of design: self-restraint, daring and patience.

Napoleon's youthful, elegant owner keeps a house in Palm Beach as well as this newly built penthouse in downtown Boston. She is currently experimenting with early retirement, just when many of her contemporaries are paying off grad school loans. Such are the benefits of a successful career in high finance.

THE PENTHOUSE MARKS THE SECOND time the homeowner has worked with architect Boyd Rourke of BRInc. Design. Some

The colors of nature play in the kitchen, where a glass mosaic backsplash sets off marble counters of rainforest brown.

years back, the pair collaborated on a ground-floor Back Bay apartment. About her new place, the homeowner says, "I was going through one of those midlife crises, not knowing where I wanted to live. I knew I wanted something completely different than what I had—something more connected to the natural world, to natural things. I love the

contrast between urban and country. And that was the goal when we came here."

Though decidedly urban, the penthouse showcases the natural world as well, thanks to its magnificent views. "When we found this place it was just air and some plaster, not even floors. You just got sucked right into the view," Rourke recalls. "What we needed to do was to contain you as soon as you enter the foyer. We needed to create layers between you and all that air."

That was indeed the challenge throughout the place: to transmute all that penthouse sky into a warm, natural-feeling atmosphere.

Inside the front door, a screen of pale



FACING PAGE TOP: A small foyer sets a welcoming tone. **BOTTOM:** The table in the breakfast area is oval rather than round. "Circles are too uptight," says Rourke. **THIS PAGE:** A bookcase in the kitchen creates a buffer between the room and the vast view.

THIS PAGE: Boyd designed almost all the furnishings for the master suite including the bed and bedside tables. **FACING PAGE TOP:** The master bath is fir-paneled and marble-tiled. **FACING PAGE BOTTOM:** Look closely—the sheers at the windows in the study sparkle with sequins.



wood cleverly creates a small foyer, delaying entry to the living room. The complex lattice-work piece, crafted by sculptor Ben Watkins of Providence, looks like a wall of ingeniously woven Popsicle sticks punctuated by voids. The voids represent the stars—holes in the night sky—and hint at the natural-world theme echoed throughout the home. Where so many “money views” would shamelessly show off—a wall of glass right in one’s face, for example—this one is subtle. The unique entry sequence speaks to how well a sophisticated client can collaborate with an experienced designer such as Rourke. (An architect trained at the Boston Architectural College, Rourke left the office of New England Design Hall of Famer William Hodgins in 1995 to go out on his own.)

THIS MAY BE A NATURAL SPACE, ONE OF MANY MODERN exercises in “bringing the outside in,” but Rourke executed it on a highly nuanced level. For example, the ceiling light in the foyer could have been obviously “celestial”—a chandelier with all sorts of metal rays to match the partition with the starry voids—but Rourke wisely kept it simple. “You have to have a sense of hierarchy,” he says. “A chandelier like that would have detracted from the partition.”

The penthouse’s layout keeps public and private spaces apart. The living room, kitchen and breakfast room flow into one another for an open feel, while the master suite and study occupy spots down halls at either end of the living spaces.

As the owner serves tea in the living room, Rourke points out the coffee table and stools, all pieces brought from his client’s last apartment. In their former lives back on Exeter Street the table had a limestone surface and the stools had a tiger print. Now the table wears a top of black granite, and the stools have been reupholstered in velvet with red pinstripes. The switch, naturally, had a strategic purpose: the contrast of the black and red pulls your eye to the center of the room, away from the view of the State House and Boston Garden. It’s another example of the “containment” idea so important to Rourke: “the layering, something to stop your eye.”

For the overall color scheme, says Rourke, “I just pulled the colors out of the sky. They’re basically neutrals that allow the natural elements like wood and stone to really pop out.”

Two natural elements that do, indeed, pop in the living room are the oak-paneled walls and a pair of Blanche P.

Field lampshades that seem to be made of long wooden matchsticks. Rourke says the shades involved so much tedious handwork, he doubts Field, who has a showroom in the Boston Design Center, would ever be willing to make them again. Rourke had the oak panels lightened using a 1950s technique that predates bleaching. In keeping with the natural-world theme, the sofa and two armchairs wear fabrics with leafy prints, and the draperies have a starburst design woven into them. The white sheers, though they are fabric, have a fluffy quality that reminds the owner of some exotic fur. “I have to remember to comb and pet them,” she says.

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TURQUOISE AND brown predominate in the bedroom, where Kochman, Reidt + Haigh Cabinetmakers of Stoughton, Massachusetts, paneled one wall in a smooth, dark wood. A turquoise-upholstered bench designed by Rourke sits at the foot of the bed, which is covered by a faux bearskin. A natural feel is good, but when it comes to animal fur, says Rourke, “We’d never use real.”

The colors of nature play in the kitchen, where marble counters of rainforest brown are set off by a glass mosaic backsplash. A less talented designer with a less savvy client might have hesitated to combine the marble’s squiggly, liana-like patterns with the vertical geometry of the brownish glass. “But there are very different ways of matching patterns,” says Rourke. “You can do it with scale or texture or color, as long as you create a balance.”

His sophisticated balancing act makes every space in the penthouse work in warm, subtle and ultimately satisfying ways. **NEH**

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