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PHOTOGRAPHY BY CRAIG WASILEWSKI

right angles

You can get great perspective on your life with great design — and people who listen to each other while they make the pieces fit.

The newest homeowner in NorthCreek, Denver's latest residential luxury development, is a young bachelor. Because he likes to be in the thick of friends and family and surrounded by scores of restaurants (50 and counting), he rejected isolated serenity and bought a raw builder's shell across the street from Cherry Creek Shopping Center. With the help of a simpatico contractor, Steve Diamond of Englewood's Diamond Homes, and an intuitive interior designer, Richele Ashmore of Your Natural Home in Denver, the owner turned his shell into solid comfort.

"I'm young, and I want to have fun," he says. "But I don't want to live in a 'pod.' I wanted a real home. It had to be masculine, but I didn't want an old man feel. The design had to be modern. And here's where I get a little schizophrenic: I have a very traditional side. I grew up in Colorado; my family has been in Colorado for generations. I'm proud of that. And I like Western art."



On fabric textures, Ashmore went all out. Heavyweight, patterned silks cover walls and drape windows. Cotton velvets and leather cover chairs. "We put a teddy bear of a sofa in the living room. It's covered in fine mohair, and you want to curl up on it. But the design is classic. And a lot of people don't realize that good mohair is not prickly; it's just incredibly soft." The feel of every surface and plane was considered. "We chose dark green soapstone



for the indoor, outdoor, and butler's kitchens," she says. "It has touchability and a look of weathering. It's not slick and cold like granite."

The homeowner thinks muted surfaces give what could be very formal spaces a relaxed feel. Ashmore agrees. "If you soften surfaces, people are not afraid to put down a drink," she says, something that was important to the owner. "They'll rest a hand on a counter or lean against a wall in conversation. Now you are living a life instead of visiting a scene." The tumbled brick in the accent wall in the kitchen, for example, "has been around," says Ashmore. "You can feel the heck out of it."

In the game room, camel-hair wool on the pool table repeats in draperies that disappear into pocket panels on warm summer nights. In the winter, they provide cozy warmth and extra soundproofing. Squares large and small are designed into the rug and switch-controlled window shades.

Traditional walnut cabinets hide temperature-controlled drinks (there is also closet wine

storage). Invisible magnetic closures lock the doors when small relatives visit, and only the homeowner has the secret opener.

In the library, old and new meld. Custom chairs, for example, were surface-aged, so people would be drawn to sit down instead of avoid touching them. The ultra-traditional coffered ceiling, found in many a men's club, is fitted with modern pin lights that accent precise areas and prevent the room from being too dark. Walnut cabinets hold rare editions but also offer considerable storage for technological gear, in well-concealed panels, as the walnut desk doubles as a wireless office.

ACCESS IS EVERYTHING

How do you meet old structural demands that must bend to a modern will? You make a plan; you revise that plan; you revise the new plan. You lose sleep. You go to Europe.

"NorthCreek shares some challenges with heavily built-out European cities," says Roy Kline of Western Development Group in Denver, who, with his partner David Steel, headed to London and Berlin for some targeted fact-finding before diving into the NorthCreek project in 2005. "Like their premier neighborhoods, our location is central," says Kline. Built between First and Second avenues, bordered by Detroit Street and Fillmore Plaza, NorthCreek overlooks Saks Fifth Avenue and all the temptations of the shopping center to the south. "There's constant coming and going," says Kline. "You absolutely want that activity for all the amenities it attracts. But traffic sound needs to be lessened. Access to your home from busy streets has to be controlled."

One characteristic of high-end European residential areas is the insider's park, a green oasis of relative quiet, often hidden from the main street and available only to residents. At NorthCreek, a tree-lined courtyard was constructed that can be seen from Second Avenue but is accessed through an iron gate that opens for owners via transponder. In the underground parking garage, coded cars allow owner-only access to residential levels. Plus, there's that luxury standby: 24-hour valet parking via a 24-hour concierge.



The access issue extends to design inside the homes as well. For example, the owner wanted a way to entertain without having his entire house opened up during prep time. "We created a fully equipped butler's kitchen that can be entered from the front door," says Diamond. "Service personnel have everything they need to prepare any amount of food. It



OPPOSITE PAGE: In the library, chairs are fitted with full side pockets to stash an unfinished magazine or book. A traditional check on the sofa transitions from the carpet in the adjoining game room. A wall of walnut cabinets extends to the coffered ceiling, lit by modern pin lights.

THIS PAGE: The cowboys of Oleg Starrowsky's oil *Big Day* are clearly done working, setting the tone for relaxation. A custom headboard is extra high with a pronounced but soothing paisley-inspired pattern. "It has the feel of a five-star hotel," says Ashmore. "The room has a lighter color palette, which is still masculine. Sometimes it's expected that a masculine room will be dark." Ashmore and the owner worked together to plan ceiling lighting that lifts the eye into the space. Straight lines and textures on walls and draperies are surmountous but chosen carefully, so the room does not feel like a den. And the closer you get, the better it looks — and feels. Walls are upholstered in subtle silk stripes. Curtains contain tlay squares of pressed silk. Both help soundproof the cozy peace of the room. Chairs in cushioned velvet invite you to pull out a book under the stacked alabaster reading light. Crosshatched diamonds on a bench also link to overall patterns of the home. The carpet is so soft, it's like stepping into a giant's padded slipper.



"When we first walked in," Diamond says, "it had a concrete floor, concrete ceiling, structural columns, and an exterior door. It was a long, concrete box." The good part? Diamond was able to be in on every meeting from the beginning and put together his own team. "You get clues about what the client really wants that way. And this was a very involved owner."

How do you unify a long space and bring people through the home without compressing the feel of the rooms? Diamond and Ashmore returned to the first basic shapes we mastered as toddlers: circles and squares — huge, tiny, stretched, or compressed — all carefully placed and imaginatively interpreted. You don't need an "A" in 10th-grade geometry for your eye to

make sense of a shape, even if it's a hexagon, especially if it's fashioned out of beautiful stone and glowing in well-considered light.

By repeating details, rooms angle closely into each other while directing the eye via repetition of shape and material. Pyramidal vaults soar in multiple ceilings. Honed squares of travertine flooring flare into marble medallions that announce the foyer and appear again in a cunningly curved hallway. When you look up from the marbled mosaic under your feet, you see you've stepped in front of a niche built into the wall to showcase art.

"Straight hallways can look like a bowling alley," says Ashmore bluntly. "This one is curved with a purpose. It makes you walk it differently. And it became an art gallery."

In every room, hidden controls light up luxurious functions. But restaurant-grade kitchen amenities and modern game room entertainments are grounded by rich, dark walnut cabinets and travertine and marble floors. In the game room, subtle squares texture velvet curtains and make sense of a bold geometric rug. These carefully chosen elements play nicely together, but they all play their own tune.

YOU'VE GOT TO FEEL IT

Ashmore went easy on color. "The owner loves his art," she says. "That was our color palette. Walls and furniture are a natural backdrop of stone hues, accented with deep green and black."



OPPOSITE PAGE: As they enter the foyer, guests step onto a medallion designed by the owner. Inlaid with travertine and multiple hues of marble, the eternal shape of a circle forms the foyer's walls, accents the floor medallion, grounds the beveled glass of mahogany doors and rises into a domed ceiling, glowing in the light of an alabaster bowl chandelier. Harnessing the power of such classic geometry creates a sense of arrival. Highlighted shapes, whether cut into vaults above or decor below, continue to announce transitions as you walk through rooms in the home.

THIS PAGE: The living room's traditional elements, such as moldings and bookcase columns, were done in white on white to create a more modern canvas. "We were always looking for a cleaner, crisper treatment because the owner is young... yet aware of tradition," says Astrovicz.



connects to the outdoor living room and patio. There is a pass-through to the central kitchen but no access to the main part of the house."

An advantage Kline and Steel had over their European inspirations was the technology to soundproof these homes. Concrete layered with AcoustiMat, a nylon core, prevents sound from traveling through ceilings and floors, and a half-inch airspace between multi-paned windows muffles street noise. And they did not go far to find a supply of local material. Most of the exterior red sandstone in the seven-story tower, nine brownstones, and courtyard fountains came from a quarry

in Lyons, CO. "We may have gone far to come up with our plan," says Steel. "But we wanted to like our jobs right here in Colorado."

"All the elements come together when you build relationships," says Diamond. "A good builder, architect, designer all working in concert can make it look seamless. I'm the band director. The best compliment I can get is for the owner to say, 'That went well.' And you've done it, and you're gone, and it's a home."

That's what happened for this owner. "Every time I walk in, I feel like I'm coming in for the first time," he says. "Everything feels good." ■



The outdoor patio, with planters made of Colorado sandstone, doubles the living space of the home and can be accessed from nearly every room. The floor is heated, so snow melts away all winter long. Heavy metal casing gives the French doors a modern look — and houses other modern features. "These doors lock in several places, like a bank vault," says Steel. In addition, glass is treated with a blue-tinted, high-performance coating, so the homeowner's privacy is protected, yet sunlight can still flood in. The outdoor kitchen is separated from the patio by huge fabric panels that close off the space from the outside section when it's cold (two giant ceiling heaters and a fireplace also help) and sweep up and away for summer barbecues. A commercial-grade Wolf stove and an overhead grill provide practical help with entertaining.



OPPOSITE PAGE: The bold pattern of the game-room rug is carried into the adjacent library. The pool table is upholstered in camel-hair wool.

THIS PAGE: Dark green soapstone countertops in the kitchen have a warmth and touchability to them that you can't get with cold, shiny granite. The tumbled brick walls also have an element of wear that keeps the space from becoming too slick. It maintains a lived-in feel. From the panel in the kitchen, functions in the entire house can be controlled.

