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MARCH/APRIL 2009

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A NATURAL HIGH

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A Natural High

A condo far above the streets of Boston gets revamped to play up both its panoramic water views and the amazing deck-garden that wraps it in color, texture and fragrance.

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the captured garden | produced by kyle hoepner





Textured walls and nubby fabrics on clean-lined furniture satisfy a wife's desire for a lavish feel and a husband's preference for a contemporary look.

The challenge was conceiving an interior plan that would blend the right measures of simplicity and luxury.





Curves and angles come together in the dining room, where the shapely table is paired with a sleek banquette. The painting is by Boston artist Timothy Craig. FACING PAGE: Hints of amber and orange bring warmth to the cool color scheme.

No one could be blamed for assuming Karen Semmelman and Bernie Ortwein chose their Boston condominium for its spectacular views. Just about every window of the unit offers a vista of the Charles River or Boston Harbor. But the real draw, especially for Semmelman, was the 2,000 square feet of outdoor space surrounding the condo. Yes, that's right: seven floors above the streets of Boston, their corner unit sports a wraparound deck that may well be the largest in the city.

Semmelman, a matrimonial lawyer, moved from Maryland to Boston to be with Ortwein, a law professor and her new husband. She looked forward to city living, but as a devoted gardener she worried about missing the three-and-a-half acres she had on the Chesapeake Bay. "To find 2,000 square feet outside in the middle of Boston is pretty amazing," she says. "That's what prompted us to buy."

Despite the wonderful views and expansive outdoor area, the apartment didn't hold a lot of appeal for the couple when they first saw it. Architecturally, the 1,660-square-foot space met their needs. But the previous owner had favored a stark, masculine look that Semmelman and Ortwein found sterile. "We wanted to soften the lines and the feel," Semmelman says. "We wanted the decor to be reflective of the outside."

She fancied something monochromatic that echoed the views of garden, sky and water, but she also likes her surroundings to feel lush and sensuous. Her new husband, on the other hand, tends toward a cleaner, less-cluttered, more modern look. For Camille Garro, the Wellesley, Massachusetts-based designer the couple charged with revamping their new quarters, the challenge was conceiving an interior plan that would blend just the right measures of simplicity and luxury.

Garro, working with her then-assistant, Casey Timm,

Garro added sparks of bright color. "I thought it needed just a pop from the other side of the spectrum."



started with the palette, creating a color scheme focused on pale blues and greens. "They wanted to respect and recognize the outside," Garro says of her clients. "They're on the water, and though they didn't want that cliché of everything nautical, they wanted to get that freshness, the water feel."

To ward off any coldness that might result from using the colors of sea and sky, the designers introduced lots of texture. "Every product, every medium we used incorporated texture," notes Garro.



Designer Camille Garro opened the small kitchen up by replacing some upper cabinets with added counter space and a bright-blue glass-tile backsplash.

Grasscloth walls—blue in the living room and green in the dining room—soften the look. Nubby fabrics, like the brown chenille on the dining room banquette, the Ultra-suede on the kitchen’s barstools and the soft chenilles in beige and blue on the living room sofa and chairs, give Semmelman the luxury she craves. To satisfy Ortwein’s desire for an uncluttered look, the furniture is clean-lined and modern. And Garro and Timm searched out pieces that are a natural fit for the spouses’ differing tastes; the dining

table, for instance, has a thoroughly contemporary base of hammered nickel, but its soft curves hint at sensuality.

For more warmth, Garro added a spark of bright color here and there, putting pumpkin-hued pillows on the living room sofa and installing amber pendant lights above the dining table. “Karen wanted to keep it monochromatic, but I thought it needed just a pop





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:
 A breakfast nook occupies one corner of the expansive deck. Homeowners Bernie Ortwein and Karen Semmelman. A bamboo fence allows privacy and keeps breezes at bay in the outdoor living room. The deck includes serene spots for strolling. **FACING PAGE:** Grasses and tall perennials bring the sounds of the breeze to the dinner table.



from the other side of the color spectrum,” Garro says. “And my client was thrilled with the result.”

When it came to window dressing, Garro used texture again to satisfy both her clients. “Karen wanted window treatments, but Bernie didn’t,” the designer says. In the living room, she used a diaphanous silk with a subtle horizontal pattern that mimics ocean waves. “It’s sheer, so you can see through it, but it gives the warmth Karen was looking for,” she says. Similarly, the designer brought a lavish touch to the serene, Zen-like bedroom by installing translucent organza panels over a textured pale-green fabric across the entire wall behind the bed.

Small as it is, the condo feels spacious thanks to the continuous flow of pale color and the not-quite-to-the-ceiling walls topped with glass panels that allow light to infuse the whole unit.

If the small interior needed to be given a sense of spaciousness, the opposite was true outside. “You came out of the sliding door from the dining room and it was one big expanse,” says garden designer Deborah Trickett. “You felt kind of exposed. So the first thing we wanted to do was break it up into more intimate spaces.”

Luckily, says the Milton, Massachusetts-based pro, the previous owner had installed the decking, walkways, gravel

Sheer organza panels over a pale textured fabric bring a lavish touch to the serene master bedroom.



and many of the planters. “That was a blessing; a lot of the heavy lifting was already done,” she says.

Still, the existing landscaping, like the original interior, had a linear quality that Semmelman wanted to temper. Trickett began by creating a sitting area delineated by a curved bamboo fence. “We used the bamboo for privacy, but also to bring in some softness,” she says.



Sumptuous fabrics and simple furniture bring both luxury and serenity to the bedroom. **FACING PAGE:** Garro's emphasis on texture shows in a bedroom vignette, where a bamboo-front dresser, a silk rug and fiber art join forces.

The fence also comes in handy for keeping at bay the stiff breezes that can blow in off the water. Plantings include grasses that sway and rustle in the breeze, and colorful perennials, including goldenrod, Limelight hydrangea and deep purple caryopteris. Other outdoor “rooms” include a dining area, a breakfast nook and various walkways.

Trickett's plantings reflect the interior, such as a blue spruce outside the blue-walled living room, for example. “You see the garden from so many areas of the condo, we

wanted to make it flow from inside to out,” she says.

Gardener and homeowner worked closely together to configure the space and to choose plants and furniture. “She loves flowers,” says Trickett of Semmelman. “We were giddy at many nurseries.”

And giddy, one can imagine, is just how Semmelman and Ortwein must feel coming home to the comfort and grace of their aerie high above the city streets. **NEH**

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Camille Garro

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