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Chicago Edition*

*Inspirations in **Design** and **Art** for the Home



tradition with a **twist**

Summer
Seating

Designer Finds

The Tricoci
Residence:
A Cut Above

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Patience. P A Y S

Find a private, wooded lot with a special view. Build a house that takes a couple into their empty-nester years, yet still works now with two active teens. Furnish the home with nearly everything new, but make it look like the owners slowly accumulated possessions they love. And make the entire process so smooth that those involved toast each other when the construction and delivery vans pull away.

Sounds like a challenge for a reality TV show, right? It could be. But it also turned out to be the storyline for a real-life architecture and design project on Chicago's North Shore. Success wasn't due to some big, rich mogul orchestrating the hiring and

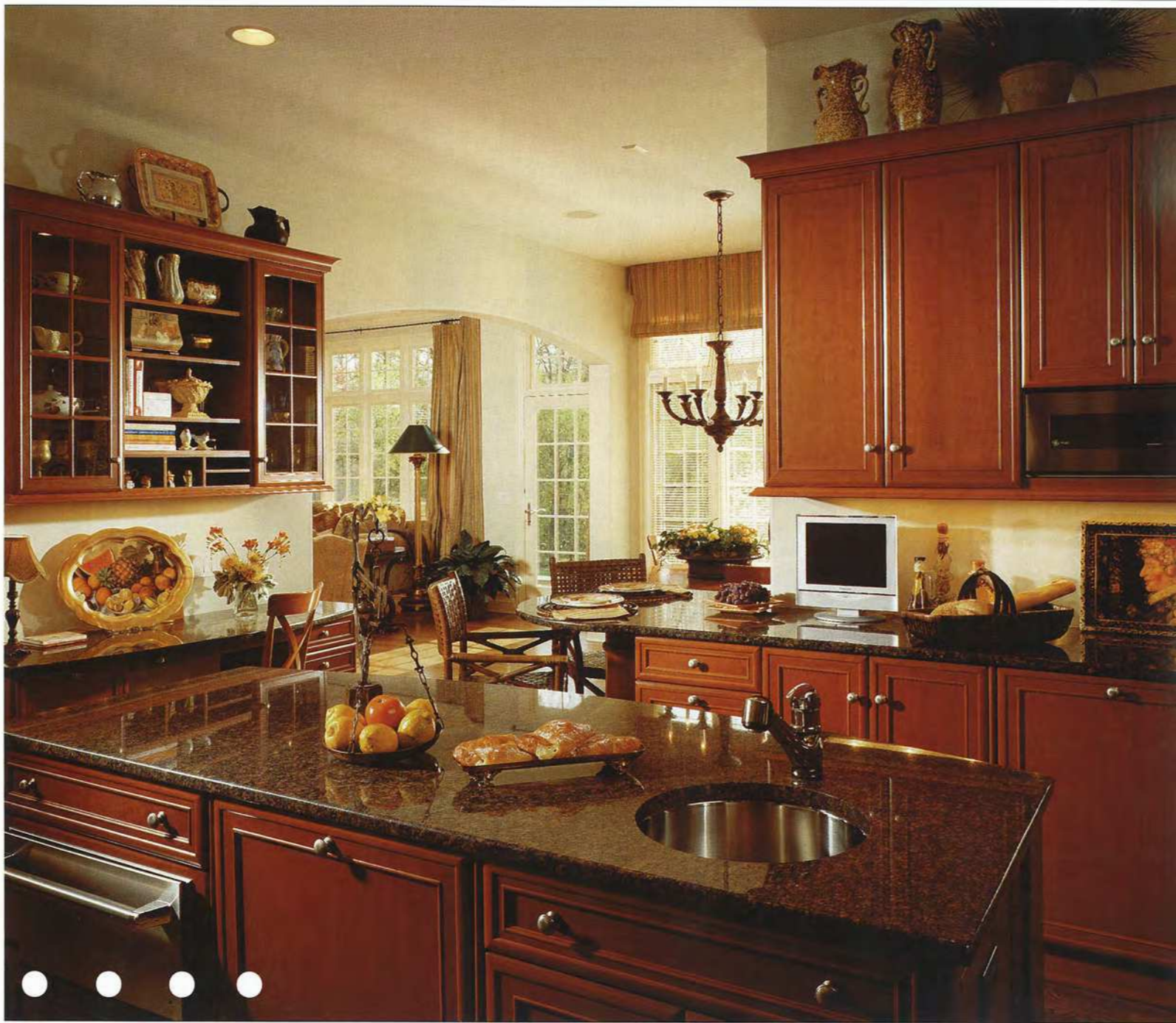
time frame. Instead, the stars aligned because of teamwork, determination and experience. Credit goes equally to the owners of the 4,800-square-foot house and all of their design professionals.

The couple, who had never built a home, knew to do their homework about what they wanted in the design and location. Two of their main decisions were to wait until they found a private, wooded lot and until their children were old enough to move from the child-oriented neighborhood where they previously lived.

They slowly looked and scouted model homes, houses for sale and vacant lots to cement their wish list. After seeing a



**The family room, with overscaled furniture and an elegant but practical Aubusson rug, was planned for active family use and replaces a traditional living room that might have been created more for show.*



**The kitchen island acts as a central work station for the well-equipped room, which was located strategically near a separate breakfast area, adjacent to the dining room and outdoor dining area, as well as separate laundry and mud rooms beyond.*

Patience...P A Y S

"You want to make a house as interesting architecturally as possible."

"concept" home from the Bannockburn-based builder Orren Pickell, founder of Orren Pickell Design & Builders, they made another decision: the builder. "We liked that Pickell builds houses that have Old World charm and meticulous detailing, take advantage of a site and its views, and have modern amenities," says the wife.

Finding the site proved tougher. They drove around the North Shore, but it wasn't until a snowy winter day that the husband, a businessman, came upon a house on a private lane. "I happened to drive down it and realized I had been there before. But this time there was a for-sale sign on a house that bordered a golf course," he says.

He and his wife called Pickell and asked him to walk through it with them. Though the house could have been remodeled, Pickell suggested tearing it down because of its high levels of asbestos and lead and the need to make many changes to satisfy their program.

The two-story, French Country house Pickell designed is far from a clone of something from long ago. It appears traditional on the exterior with Wisconsin limestone sheathing, a wood shake roof, a turret and circular driveway, but inside it's tradition with a twist—a curve here, an angle there, a step-down bar and an open plan with enormous windows that brings the house into the 21st century. The design wasn't done for show but to add character, complexity and a surprise, Pickell says. "You want to make a house as interesting architecturally as possible so you don't walk in and see the same-old,



**Because the owners wanted a view straight through from the front door to the backyard, the plan includes columns to offer some separation between the foyer and family room but not block views.*

Patience....



**The spiral staircase was built into the turret and lies to the side of the foyer so that it doesn't take space from the multipurpose entry area.*

same-old. But you also don't want to go to extremes and sacrifice livability. Curves soften angles and add some unpredictability," he says.

Pickell also brings to his projects an ability to remove the angst from what's typically a long process—in this case 15 months. He also suggests design experts with whom he's worked, pays attention to clients' wishes, and balances wants versus budgets and site challenges.

This couple's lot was narrow—just 100 feet wide. Because they requested that the golf course be seen from many rooms and the front door, Pickell fashioned a stepped-back plan with few hallways and with the large windows along the rear.

He and his colleagues didn't stop there. With help from landscape architects Martin and Associates in Vernon Hills and interior designers Girot-Sarti & Alt Ltd. in Park Ridge, the living contin-

ues outdoors. A multi-level, partly covered verandah stretches across the back, creating an immense room with a hot tub and cooking station. "It's like being on vacation all the time," the wife says.

Even the builder is a bit wowed. "The outdoor area is extraordinary and larger than we've provided," says Pickell, who prides himself on learning from each project.

Another lesson he took away is that many owners no longer want a living room. After analyzing how they used their former home, this couple reached that conclusion, even if it meant the house might be harder to sell. They asked instead for a cozy but amply sized library

and family room. Pickell's solution was a book-lined library at the front of the house that can be closed with doors for privacy. "It's a room we use daily. Our children do homework at the desk; my husband plays the piano," the wife says. The family room lies directly behind a large foyer and includes the sunken bar.

The couple's other requests included a kitchen with a bigger work area than they previously had, large closets, separate mud and laundry rooms, and a bedroom level with a private master retreat with fireplace, golf-course views and a luxurious spa-style bathroom to rival a five-star hotel's.

Throughout the house the level of finish reflects the finest: tumbled marble, granite, thick columns, beamed and tray ceilings, and a circular staircase in its own corner.

Since the owners kept only one Lucite table and a collection of plates and teapots from their previous home, designers Tom Girot and Robert Alt faced a major challenge: to furnish an entire house but not make it look like it was instantly done. They succeeded by designing elegant rooms that are teen-friendly and not fussy. Many fabrics are sturdy tapestries and chenilles in beiges and browns; seating is overscaled; and area rugs are patterned so dirt doesn't show easily.

The designers also took some liberties with traditional design. From the moment visitors walk through the front door, they know the home isn't the same-old, same-old décor. In the high-ceilinged

"But you also don't want to go to extremes and sacrifice livability. Curves soften angles and add some unpredictability,"

foyer, they grouped a pair of upholstered leather chairs, a Chinese chest and two large celadon pots planted with palms. "We wanted to set the elegant pace of the house, show the views and make it a meeting area," Alt says.

The one space left unfinished until recently was the basement, which Pickell has found many owners prefer to complete after they've lived in a house. It now contains recreation and exercise rooms and a guest suite.

The true mark of successful architecture and design is the clients' satisfaction level. In this case, it is high. "So many people who've built say they'd do this or that differently the next time. There's nothing we'd change, and we plan to be here long after the children go to college," the wife says. "This isn't a showplace, but our home." *



**The dining room was designed to expand into the foyer when the family has large gatherings and needs to set additional tables.*