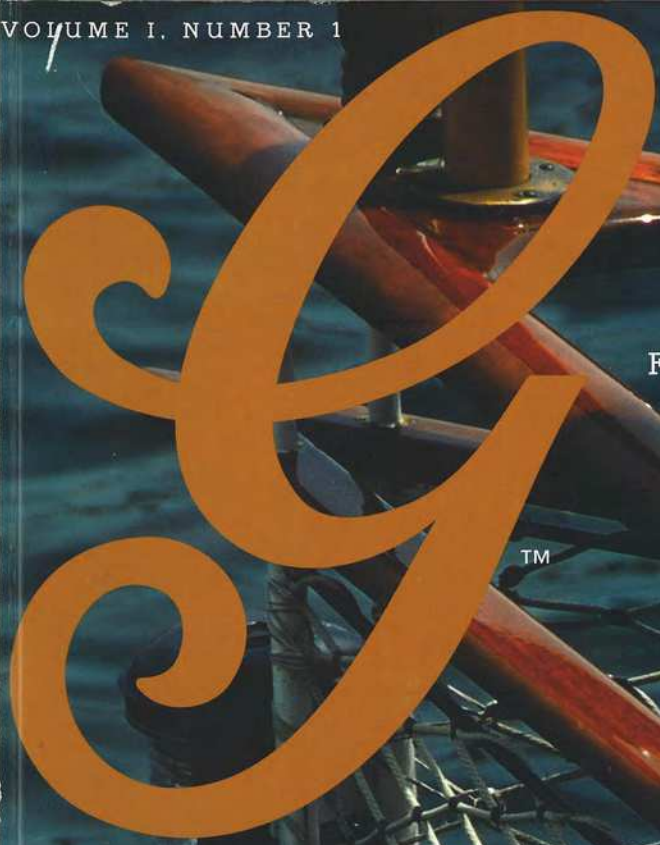


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## RETREAT

Convenience and warmth. Home technology flourishes beneath a handcrafted disguise.

BY PATRICIA SHERMAN



Gone are the days of unsightly metal refrigerators, visually invasive audio-video systems, and cookie-cutter cabinetry. Wonderful advances have been made in home technology and in the custom-crafted solutions that hide such conveniences.

### FINE CRAFTSMANSHIP RETURNS TO CABINETRY

Popular design terms of yesteryear—like “Custom Kitchen”—often fell short in reality. A so-called custom kitchen typically meant choosing from a predetermined range of cabi-

net modules, assembling them like dominos, then topping them with crown molding.

The art of handcrafting heirloom furniture and casegoods has slowly diminished over decades, yielding to the economies of production-oriented products. Thankfully, handcrafted touches are making a comeback, given market demand for timeless design and execution.

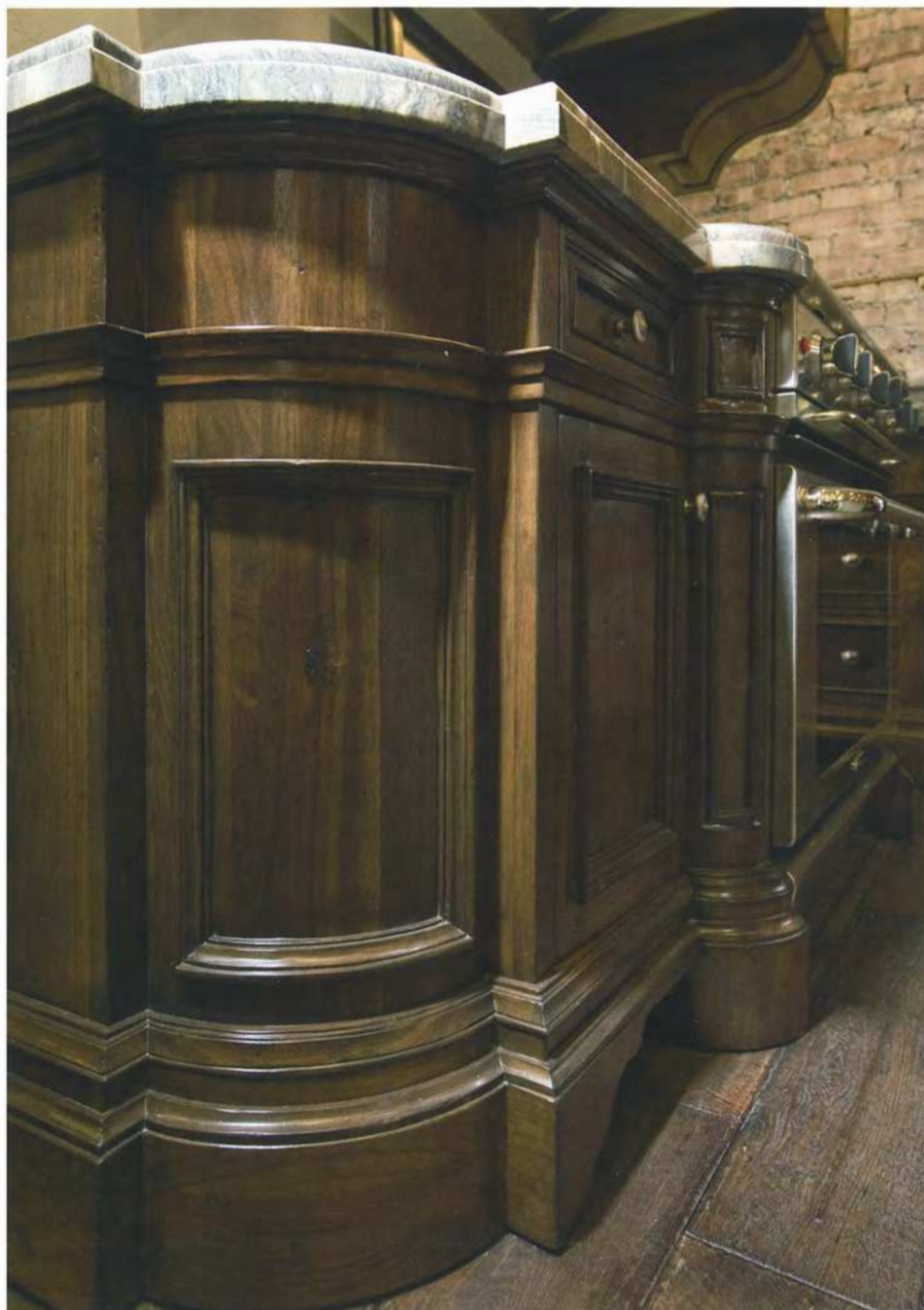
In recent years, a few manufacturers have emerged, specializing in a total custom product, from design through finish. With impeccable craftsmanship and artisans using hand

finishing techniques of European masters, these new products are about as far from “production line” as one can find.

Requests for custom cabinetry and millwork are matched with a staff of carvers, metal craftsman and finishers, who hand distress, stain, and wax each creation. Artisans take ownership of each piece from start to finish. The overall attention to detail is immediately recognizable as a hand made product.

This total custom approach is liberating for designers, as this new wave of manufacturers is willing—and able—to build whatever can





be imagined, no longer holding design hostage by 'order by number' solutions.

#### FLOORS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

As recently as a few years ago, choosing flooring materials tended to be reserved for the last stages of any home construction or remodeling project.

In today's most elegant homes, flooring has moved into the spotlight. Choices today extend well beyond machine-fabricated, snap-together wooden flooring and a sea of carpeting options.

Generally speaking, builders, designers, and homeowners are approaching flooring with much more consciousness. Of course, beauty and practicality are important. But, today's homeowner also demands a product that is environmentally sustainable and that will not lead to interior air quality issues.

While fifty-four percent of homes still have carpeted floors, the number is decreasing. Vinyl and ceramic tile are also being passed over in favor of wood floors. Seventeen percent of new homes contain hardwood floors throughout.

Today, exquisite hardwood floors are available — handcrafted from the finest selection of old growth white oak, truly centuries old. The natural beauty of rift and quartersawn cuts is enhanced by the hand scraped and hand distressed surface created by true craftsman. With deep, rich, burnished stain colors and the classic finish of paste wax, these floors compliment any decor.

Environmentally, reclaimed wood, bamboo, natural linoleum, and cork floors are coming into favor. Cork is especially great in kitchens to ease back pressure from long





periods of standing. Recycled glass tile in bathrooms is ideal.

Stone is also favored because of its timeless look, minimum maintenance requirements and durability. Stone options abound, such as antiqued Turkish travertine. Cut to a 1-1/4-inch thickness and laid in a variety of patterns, the soft tumbled edges pay tribute to the old world beauty of hand laid, natural stone. Stone base details can also be cut from the same material, adding a new level of class to any interior.

#### HOME AUTOMATION LEAPS FORWARD

The technology promises of yesterday's home went largely unfulfilled. Home automation marketing phrases like "Smart House" were simply not true, with execution falling short of promise. Fortunately, the home electronics industry has evolved far beyond simplistic furnace and lighting timers and independent controls for each system in the home.

Home automation now means fully integrated, intelligent control over lighting,

comfort, entertainment, and security systems—along with energy conservation. More importantly, an automation system provides a home that intuitively understands your tastes and expectations and delivers them with simple "lifestyle buttons."

An activity as commonplace as watching a movie can be as enjoyable as if you had a fully staffed theater. Music that matches your frame of mind can welcome you at the door. Lights, fountains, and ambience can be ready for entertaining at the touch of a button. Home technology can make your home as comfort-





able as the aesthetics of the home itself.

Your dream home is more than a showcase of stunning architecture, spacious rooms and comfortable surroundings. Life within your home should be relaxing with the interior environment matched to whatever mood you are in. Repetitive tasks, like switching on lights and fountains for the evening, happen as if by magic—with the added bonus of conserved energy when rooms and luxuries are not in use. Summer homes in Lake Geneva benefit from home automation systems by way of remotely managed heat-

ing and cooling controls, and remote monitoring of home electrical, plumbing and security systems.

The time to start thinking about your home electronics system is when your new home is still in its dream stage. A successful solution is best created through the combined efforts of your architect, interior designer, builder, lighting designer, integrated systems designer, and, of course, you.

However, just because you've already built your dream home doesn't mean an integrated home electronics system can't be part

of it. An integrated systems designer can customize a system for your existing home, seamlessly integrating lighting, entertainment, climate control and security to match your needs and desires.

Automation technology continues to play a significant role in the enjoyment of your home, and it does so with minimal visual impact, often hidden behind a disguise of custom-designed and fabricated casegoods, millwork and furnishings.





#### GET EXPERT HELP

It may be wise to establish a good multi-disciplinary design team. Contrary to what you might think, a good design team can curb spending that could create a less-than-desirable result.

An interior designer has the eye and resources to coordinate all of the design elements into a beautiful and cohesive interior. Your interior designer and architect work with the various subcontractors making certain the entire project comes together as a unified

whole, rather than a disjointed assemblage of opinions and materials.

Having your interior designer and architect collaborate with your environmental systems designer will insure that system controls are conveniently placed and that large electrical appliances (such as flat screen video displays, and stereo components) are properly hidden.

And finally, good communication between your designer and architect — especially early in the project — will guarantee that your furnishings work within the designed space.

#### A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP

As home technology systems have advanced, custom casegoods, millwork, and flooring have found their "old soul" through hand craftsmanship and finishing techniques of another time. Today's home technology flourishes beneath a handcrafted disguise — a symbiotic relationship between convenience and warmth that will add to the overall beauty and enjoyment of any interior. 🐾