

STYLE HOME



GET THE LOOK

Think things through before the walls go up. That will enable you to avoid dead space and establish the infrastructure for energy, communication and entertainment systems.

When in doubt, call in the pros. It could prevent an expensive mistake.

Analyze the floor plans of model homes. "You will see the things you like—and the things you would rather change," Cathy Rossi says.

Blend low-tech with high-tech. Ceiling fans are an energy-efficient way to keep spaces comfortable year round. Smart wiring enables the Rossis to program their home to automatically lower or raise the blinds, adjust the thermostat and conserve energy.

Shop till you drop. The Rossis scoured sources close to home and throughout the Mid-Atlantic region to find just the right furnishings.

Clockwise from far left: The Rossis can see parts of four states from their Wilmington condo. The condo's color palette was inspired by a painting of flowers. The wrought iron headboard doesn't block the breathtaking view. The Rossis took advantage of every nook and cranny for storage.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOM THOMPSON

The Height of Living

A dynamic duo combines talents to create a dream home on high.

BY EILEEN SMITH
DALLABRIDA

Cathy and Jimmy Rossi had high hopes for their River Tower at Christina Landing penthouse, 24 stories above Wilmington's riverfront.

"It's our room with a view," Cathy says.

Indeed. With jaw-dropping vistas of four states, the 2,006-square-foot condominium is an urban oasis in the sky, a serene and sophisticated place to watch the snow fly—without ever having to shovel it.

Design and construction of the unit took nearly three years, which gave the Rossis plenty of time to refine the details of their dream home, down to the last inch of closet space.

The Rossis were the ideal couple to take on the challenge. Cathy, the visual spouse, would manage

the interior design. Jimmy, the techie, would keep a handle on the systems.

But it takes a team to tackle such a complex project. So the couple worked closely with the developer, Buccini/Pollin Group. They also brought in other pros, who lent both expertise and a fresh set of eyes.

"We realized we were only going to get one shot at this and we wanted to do it right," Jimmy says.

Working from the ground up made it easier to integrate smart technology into the condo, systems that reduce energy consumption and enhance ambiance through programmable mood lighting and a whole-house sound system. >



STYLE HOME

Cathy had lots of ideas on how to decorate the condo by putting a contemporary twist on traditional design. But she needed guidance on establishing a sense of continuity throughout the home.

"I knew what I wanted, but I didn't know how to execute it on a reasonable budget," she says.

Enter Terri Wasdyke of Brandywine Design in North Wilmington. She had been recommended to Cathy by several colleagues at AAA Mid-Atlantic, where Cathy is manager of public and government affairs.

The starting point was a Provence-inspired painting of fall flowers in a classic blue-and-white vase. Cathy spied the piece during a visit to Winterthur Museum & Country Estate, and was immediately smitten.

"It makes me feel good when I look at it," she says. "The colors are so warm and welcoming."

That palette of gold, rust and terra cotta flows throughout the condo, an earthy counterpoint to the cool, contemporary lines of the architecture. To find furniture to complement that vibe, the Rossis searched from Wilmington to Washington, D.C., to cyberspace.

Cathy spied the curved, clean-lined sofa during a business trip to Alexandria, Virginia. She and Jimmy hopped a train to New York City to check out a French Moderne desk. A large, exuberant floral painting in a crackle finish traveled from only as far as Pala Brothers in Wilmington. And the charming still life in the kitchen was painted by Cathy when she was a little girl.

Wasdyke also shared such tricks of the trade as mounting the toilet paper holder on the half wall that separates the toilet from the tub, so it wouldn't be the first thing seen when entering the bathroom. She also suggested the Rossis replace the solid wood headboard on their bed with a wrought iron piece.

"It doesn't block the view," she says. "You can see right through it."

She also found ways to integrate family pieces into the design. Vintage milk glass pitchers and bowls collected by Cathy's mother found a home in glass-front

display cupboards mounted above the upper kitchen cabinets. Dozens of framed family photos are artfully arranged on a gallery wall.

"Terri will hold your hand as little or as much as you want—and sometimes squeeze it," Cathy says.

The open floor plan gave the Rossis lots of options. In the expansive great room adjoining the kitchen, they chose to devote square footage to the conversation area rather than designate a formal dining space. A console table expands the possibilities by opening up to seat six people. When the Rossis entertain on a large scale, they reserve the River Tower's community room.

A small niche that might have become dead space was outfitted with built-in

From a sky-high perspective, the Acelas zipping into the nearby Amtrak station look like toy trains under the Christmas tree. At night, the city lights twinkle like stars. "I love to watch the storms roll in," says Jimmy Rossi. "You can see rain clouds moving in from miles away."

library shelves and cupboards that keep paperwork stowed neatly out of sight. A large bar cabinet can accommodate enough glassware for a party, as well as the punch bowl Cathy received as a gift on her 16th birthday. (The piece was originally mounted on legs, but Wasdyke arranged for the manufacturer to substitute a base with shelves and cabinet doors, which doubled the storage capacity.)

The condo was marketed as a three-bedroom unit. The Rossis modified the floor plan to two bedrooms and a clubby den, a man cave with leather sofas and a large flat-screen TV.

The new configuration freed up a large closet, which is outfitted with shelves from the floor up to the 10-foot ceiling. "In a condo, there's no attic and no basement," Cathy says. "There's not as much room for all your stuff."

The smart-house components required to operate the condo's systems are contained in a single small closet. To supply the human brainpower behind the plan, the Rossis brought in Manny Alvarez of

Electronic Home Solutions in Hockessin.

He integrated such features as "stealth" audio speakers, which are built into ceilings and invisible to the listener. A smart box on the nightstand alerts the Rossis to the temperature, inside and outside. And you won't see messy wires anywhere.

"I hate wires," Jimmy says.

Blinds raise and lower automatically, blocking the sun to keep the condo cool in summer and harnessing solar power as a supplemental heat source in winter. Ceiling fans whirl softly throughout the seasons.

"Set the fans on reverse to keep the air circulating," Jimmy advises. "That will push down the warm air that rises."

Long before the walls went up, the Rossis knew where they would place their furniture and where the TVs would be mounted. Those details were essential in order to place the lighting. Also essential was extra framing in the walls, which is required to support flat-screen TVs. "We knew the TVs would be heavy," he says.

Throughout the process, Jimmy, a state trooper, recorded images of the pipes and wires installed in the walls and floors.

With those records in hand, it won't take much detective work to track down the source of any problems that might occur years down the road.

"It makes much more sense than breaking into walls," he says.

With a bird's-eye view of Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland, the Rossis enjoy a rare combination of natural wonders and cityscapes. From a sky-high perspective, the Acelas zipping into the nearby Amtrak station look like toy trains under the Christmas tree. At night, the city lights twinkle like stars.

"I love to watch the storms roll in," Jimmy says. "You can see rain clouds moving in from miles away."

The Rossis also enjoy other aspects of condo life. He was happy to give up raking leaves and Cathy was glad to forego commuting to work. These days, all it takes to get to the office is a short walk.

"I like the sense of community and the ease of lifestyle we enjoy here," she says. "It's our little corner of the world." ■