

In the dining room, the table is a ca. 1790 double pedestal table from a Richmond estate sale. Right, an original sketch of the apartments. Below right, the 18th-century cow-shaped creamer has ruby eyes. The china in both pictures is Royal Crown Derby King's Pattern from the 19th century.



Right out of the Roaring '20s, The Prestwould would seem to be more at home on New York's Park Avenue than in Richmond's Monroe Park. NEELY BARNWELL SPRUILL takes readers to an in-town luxury apartment that seems to have invented a new design style, Ecclesiastical Eclectic.



A Summers Place



“Life is just a stage,” says Sylvia Summers, from the dramatic neoclassical foyer that opens into her home on the fourth floor of Richmond’s The Prestwould, “and we constantly reset the stage.” A year and a half ago, Sylvia and Richard Summers moved into the condo tower, drawn by The Prestwould’s grandly scaled rooms, although fewer of them than their previous home on Monument Avenue.

Built in 1929, The Prestwould still remains one of Richmond’s best addresses. The building, first known as The Prestwould Apartments, draws comparisons to New York City’s The Dakota, a similarly tony towered condominium. The name comes from the plantation Prestwould in Mecklenburg County, the Skipwith family’s ancestral home. The Skipwiths, who had a Richmond home on the Franklin Street site where The Prestwould apartments now stand, were leading planters in Virginia.





The 56 units are held by 54 owners who range in age from 20 to 90. “A truly eclectic group,” says Sylvia. “Richard calls them the Orient Express.” They print their own monthly newsletter, *The Prestwoud Post*.

Impromptu cocktail parties on Friday nights fill the courtyard, onto which two highly desirable apartments open, one occupied by the head of the board. The Prestwoud was one of several Richmond buildings designed by English-born architect Alfred C. Bossom, who later became Lord Bossom after his election to Parliament. Bossom, who practiced in New York and married an American, was

Left, the Italian bishop is hand carved. Top, the sitting room, with Louis XV chair and 19th-century pier mirror. Middle, the kitchen. Bottom, a ‘Pet Palace’ flanked by Louis XV chairs with Aubusson fabric.

known for his skyscrapers across the U.S., though he later moved back to England. The Prestwoud was completed in 1929 and remained an apartment building until 1980, when it was sold and went

condo. “There were elevator ladies and women who cleaned the lobby all the time,” says upstairs neighbor Sally Brown, recalling the pre-condo era.

The building is layered with 12 inches of concrete and felt between every floor, making the units virtually soundproof and fireproof. Some of the couple’s enormous furniture was a tough fit. When one hall mirror wouldn’t fit in the freight elevator, Richard had to pay five movers an extra \$50 each for the two-hour trip it took up the stairs.

Despite good bones, the space “needed some detail,” Sylvia says. The living room is painted what they call “Zayde Dott’s mustard,” the color of the very English sitting room of their former across-the-street neighbor on Monument Avenue. The Summerses own one of only two units with floor-to-ceiling windows, offering a more charming view of Monroe Park than can be had from the ground. “It looks like something out of Charles Dickens,” says Sylvia of the vista where the park uncannily morphs from a municipal disaster at ground level to a lush green swath of elegant, radiating paths bordered on one side by the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart.

The working fireplace (almost all the units have them) is framed by a Federal doorway cut down to serve as a mantel. Above it hangs a copy of a work by Renaissance sculptor Luca Della Robbia. The piece was done by a Dartmouth student on a 1929 Italian study trip, making it exactly contemporary to The Prestwoud. The relief’s subject, an homage to St. Cecilia (the patron of music), is all the more appropriate as, they have been told, this was the very room in which the Richmond Symphony was founded. “One of the Satterwhites was also married here,” says Sylvia, “I forget which one.” On the east wall, a clock and armoire hold large blue and white jars that Richard, owner of Richard Summers Antiques, found in an import shop on Magazine Street in New





Above, the master bath with double sinks, made from an 1830 sideboard by Manchester, England furniture maker Thomas Turner. At bottom, Sylvia and Richard Summers. Opposite page, the pair of chairs are thrift shop, covered in cut velvet with pillows made from 19th century tapestry.

Orleans, where his parents live.

The red-lacquered dining room features an oval tray ceiling painted Zuber blue, the shade of sky from the noted French wallpaper company Zuber & Cie. Richard has painstakingly decorated the ceiling with crystals and rhinestones scalped from vintage jewelry. "I couldn't figure out how to do a fiber optic ceiling," he says of his efforts. Sylvia found the glass-beaded ship that sails overhead at auction, bid on and won it without ever having seen the object in person. The turn-of-the-century piece was probably a souvenir brought home from Italy, a kind of Grand Tour memento.

Another of Richard's pursuits is the "Pet Palaces" and "Cat-thedrals" he makes for sale, pet houses reminiscent of Victorian follies made from architectural remnants. The one he made for their Yorkie, Rosie, is a carved Gothic Revival remnant upholstered in Scalmandre silk with a tiny Baccarat chandelier, 18th-century toile pillows filled with lavender and a mink pillow made from Sylvia's aunt's cape.

One bath still has its old-fashioned tile; Sylvia decked it out in fabric she found in Paris years before. The master bath they converted to their own unique style. A terra cotta mask hangs in





the granite steam shower, and a 400-pound bust graces, or, more correctly, weighs down, a windowsill. “My mother picked her up in an antique store,” says Sylvia, “and I just felt like my life wouldn’t be as rich without her.”

Neighbor Sally Brown consulted on the kitchen design, which was by all accounts a difficult demolition. “The rubble when we tore it out was three-and-a-half feet deep,” says Brown. The maid’s bedroom and butler’s pantry were converted to an adjoining breakfast room, and the resulting space featured four different floor levels. The granite countertop was cut to fit and

then cut in half again to get it in the building. Whimsy reigns even in this utilitarian environment: Chinese heads line a window, a Corinthian capital passes as a catchall filled with spatulas and whisks. Caravati’s, Richmond’s legendary salvage shop, yielded doorknobs, drilled into cabinet pulls.

The couple converted their three-bedroom unit into one. The remaining master bedroom is a calm and beautiful beige oasis. The bedroom’s beautiful Baccarat chandelier, bedecked in period silk looped shades, is one of their most stunning pieces. “When we started buying, nobody wanted

them,” says Richard of Richmond’s still prevalent English tastes. “Everybody had the Chippendale table, the Martha Washington chair, the Queen Anne table.” “And,” Sylvia chimes in, “brass chandeliers.”

Forever a work in progress, the apartment is far from done. Good friends Bob and Anne Hines offer infinite inspiration. “They’ll come over for dinner and we’ll bounce around ideas and move furniture,” says Richard. “You can’t underestimate the value of honesty.”