

Compliments of Connie Wood Miller

Good to Be HOME

issue 32

What Kind of Home Organizer Are You?



WHAT'S YOUR HOME REALLY WORTH?

Connie Wood Miller
REALTOR®



SCAN TO SEE
YOUR CURRENT
HOME ESTIMATE!





It has been said that "an hour of planning can save you ten hours of doing." This issue of Good to Be Home helps you get a jump start on spring tasks and activities with a look at two popular vacation accommodation types, a garage makeover guide, make-ahead meal guidance, and more.

Before you know it, vacation season will be here. So you should start narrowing down your options, including where you want to stay: a hotel or a rental? The overview inside explains the pros and cons of each to help you make the best choice for you.

Once warm weather returns, so does the urge for change, and one place that's ripe for transformation is the garage. The enclosed article offers four creative ideas for turning the space into a functional room. And speaking of garages, check out the car-cleaning tips in this issue!

Household duties can become downright draining, especially when it comes to crafting meals day after day. Simplified founder Emily Ley is here to help, offering advice on streamlining the process and easy recipes from her cookbook to free up more of your time.

How will you plan now for pleasant experiences ahead? As always, it's a pleasure to send you this magazine.

Your Happiness is My Success!

Connie Wood Miller



Connie Wood Miller, REALTOR®

Direct: (469) 690-6619

Email: cmiller@pioneer-realty.com

conniewmiller.com

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CHICKEN POTPIE BITES



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conniewmiller.com

CHICKEN POTPIE BITES

INGREDIENTS

1(8-oz.) package cream cheese, softened
2 egg whites
1/2 tsp. dried thyme
1/8 tsp. paprika
1/2 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. ground black pepper
3/4 c. petite peas
1 carrot, peeled and finely grated
2 c. chicken, cooked and finely chopped
3 packages frozen phyllo cups
1/4 c. grated Parmesan cheese
1 package frozen puff pastry, thawed

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk together the cream cheese, egg whites, thyme, paprika, salt, and pepper. Add the peas, carrots, and chicken, mixing well to combine.
3. Arrange the phyllo cups on a rimmed baking sheet, and fill each one about halfway with the potpie filling. Sprinkle with the Parmesan, and bake for 15 minutes.
4. To prepare the tops, roll out the puff pastry according to the package directions. Use a 1-in. round cookie cutter to cut out circles, and bake them on a baking sheet for 15 minutes.
5. Set one baked round over each potpie bite, and serve warm.





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for a grand renovation of
a property overlooking
Narragansett Bay

Good to Be HOME

PUBLISHER

Chief Executive Officer Steven Acree
publisher@remindermedia.com

EXECUTIVE

President Luke Acree
Chief Marketing Officer Joshua Stike
Chief Operating Officer Michael Graziola
Chief Revenue Officer Ethan Acree

MARKETING

Vice President of Content and Marketing Operations
Jessica Fitzpatrick
Director of Marketing Dan Acree
Director of Creative Services Kristin Sweeney
marketing@remindermedia.com

EDITORIAL

Senior Layout Designer Jordan Hunsberger
Senior Writer and Editor Matthew Brady
Editor Dakota Damschroder
Content Writers Allison Gomes, Andre Rios
editorial@remindermedia.com

SALES AND CLIENT SUCCESS

Vice President of Operations Nicholas Bianco
Vice President of Sales Michael Campanile
Vice President of Corporate Sales Darryl MacPherson
Director of Client Success Matthew Frizalone
hello@remindermedia.com

OPERATIONS

Vice President of Finance Shana Lebofsky
Vice President of IT Thomas Setliff
Director of Business Intelligence Daniel Gallaway
Director of Manufacturing Shannon Mosser
Director of HR John Keogh
hr@remindermedia.com



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MIDJOURNEY

CLEANING

CAR CLEANING *made simple*

written by **ALLISON GOMES**

While your vehicle might not have a cozy living room, it deserves the same TLC as your home. Giving it a much-needed clean both inside and out will not only make it look better but also help preserve its value. Here are a few basic steps to get you started.

Wash the exterior

When washing your car, use a product specifically designed for automobiles to avoid damaging the paint and finish. Spray it down first to remove loose dirt, and apply the cleaner in a circular motion along the body and wheels using a soft sponge or microfiber mitt. Working top to bottom, rinse again and dry with a clean microfiber towel to prevent streaks and water spots.

Declutter the interior

Toss trash like old receipts, water bottles, and food wrappers, adding a small bin or bag hooked to your middle console to prevent future mess. Then remove anything else that doesn't belong. For the remaining items, consider investing in a seat-back or trunk organizer to keep them contained.

Tackle the surfaces

Use a vacuum to clear debris from the seats and floors and between cushions, and shake out or hose off the floor mats, allowing them to fully dry before reinstalling. Additionally, wipe down the hard surfaces—including the dashboard, console, doors, and cup holders—with a microfiber cloth and cleaner; you can use a small brush or cotton swab to get into trickier nooks like vents and seams.

Clean the windows

Wipe all the glass inside and out with a streak-free cleaner and microfiber cloth to improve both its appearance and visibility. And make sure to roll down the windows slightly to get the top edges.

Maintain it

A full clean every two weeks is best, but once a month works too. In the meantime, spot-clean spills as they happen, empty the trash often, and stay stocked with a few essentials, like wipes and air freshener, to keep your ride looking and feeling fresh.

making sense of **MUNICIPALITY NAMES**

written by
ANDRE RIOS

If you've ever used the term "city" as a catchall for any residential community or confused a town for a village, you're not alone. After all, the distinctions between the different municipalities can be slight, and there's no singular nationwide legal definition for each. Take a look at six of the most common along with their key markers to help you distinguish between them.

Cities

Generally the most complex type of municipality, cities are usually determined by their bigger populations and geographic area. Of course, not all are as sprawling as New York City or Los Angeles, but a good indicator that one may classify is if it offers a broad range of services, such as police and fire departments, public transportation, sanitation, and

zoning regulations. Cities are self-governed to an extent by elected officials, often including a mayor and a city council, and are "incorporated" with official boundaries. Because of their size, they tend to have more regulatory authority than smaller or less self-sufficient settlements.



Towns

While this term has different meanings from region to region, Americans widely agree that these communities are less crowded and geographically broad than cities. In Alabama, for example, a town is any place that falls under the population threshold of 2,000 people. Some states consider towns to be incorporated municipalities, while others see them merely as geographic areas within a county. A council or board usually leads them, and they may or may not have a mayor, depending on the local governance model.

Villages

As suggested by the charming imagery often associated with the name, villages are much smaller than cities and towns. They are often found in rural or suburban areas and may predominantly rely on agriculture and animal husbandry for their livelihood. Moreover, they generally have a limited local government that consists of a board or trustees. Services in villages may be sparser than those in cities, and in many cases, they rely on their county leadership for functions like law enforcement and road maintenance.

Townships

These municipal structures are found primarily in the Midwest and Northeast, and, as with many other residential designations, their power and scope vary greatly based on the state. Townships act as subdivisions of their county, assembling leadership like a board or administrative officer to provide services like road maintenance, recreation, and even property assessments for tax purposes. Such facilities are particularly useful in rural areas that would otherwise be underserved.



Boroughs

A rarer term only used in a handful of states, boroughs also vary dramatically in basic features across the country. For example, Pennsylvania uses this term to signify incorporated areas that are similar to towns or villages, meaning they are smaller than cities and operate under a council form of government. In contrast, New York City is divided into five boroughs—Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island. These famous examples are each larger and more populous than most American cities, but they are not independent municipalities. Rather, they are subdivisions of NYC that all have their own limited planning and budgeting representation.

Special districts and unincorporated areas

Not all communities fit neatly into a single category. Special districts are created for a specific function such as water supply, fire protection, or transportation, and they can span multiple municipalities. Meanwhile, unincorporated areas lack a municipal government and are under the authority of the county or state. They typically have fewer services but also lower taxes and regulations than alternative residences.



Whether you're moving to a new area or simply curious about your own community, researching how certain municipalities are structured in your region can help you better understand the place you call home.



MIDJOURNEY

HOTELS VS. HOME RENTALS

written by **MATTHEW BRADY**

Believe it or not, we're in prime vacation season—for booking, that is. Per data and analytics company YouGov, almost half of American travelers make their summer plans one to three months in advance of their trip, meaning that now is the time to act if you haven't already.

Fortunately, between hotels and home rental companies like Vrbo and Airbnb, you have more options available than ever. The drawback, though, is that narrowing them down can be overwhelming. This guide breaks down the key pros and cons of each to help you make a more informed decision.



HOTELS

The longtime champion of this industry, hotels (plus motels, inns, and the like) still thrive today. According to a March 2025 survey by Deloitte, 80 percent of road warriors intended to stay in a hotel at least once during their summer travels—over three times more than those planning to rent a place.

Positives

Familiarity

The saying “home away from home” epitomizes the hotel experience in a sense. Regardless of the city you’re visiting, you can be relatively certain of what your room, lobby, and even bedding will be like, especially if you frequent one chain.

Location

With this option, you’re usually staying in the heart of the action: in town and on or near a main thoroughfare. This makes it easy to see the sights and, if you’re flying to your destination, secure transportation. You’ll likely have multiple hotels to choose from in the area as well.

Freebies

Hotels draw you in with complimentary perks, primarily free breakfasts and pool access. In addition, many offer rewards programs, allowing you to accumulate points for free nights and more.

Negatives

Noise

Nothing is as frustrating on a getaway as neighbors thumping on your ceiling, loudly blaring the TV in the room next to you, or running down the hallway outside your door. Other hotel noise nuisances include being situated near the elevator or ice machine or close to a highway.

Upward mobility

Speaking of elevators, rooms on higher floors provide perks like great views, but the main downside is the length of the ride up and down. This is only amplified if you’re lugging, well, luggage.

Space

Even in the most luxurious of stays, you’re likely sharing a hotel room with your entourage, which can get a bit cramped. You may also feel crowded in frequently used areas like elevators, the main lobby, etc.





RENTALS

Home rentals have become an increasingly popular option for vacationers over the years. Though Airbnb stands out as the leader of the pack for many, it certainly isn't alone, with Vrbo and even local brokers offering equally enticing accommodations.

⊕ Positives

Space

While hotels may flounder when it comes to space, rentals thrive. You're usually getting an entire home or apartment with the latter, which equates to much more room (potentially even individual bedrooms and a yard), independence, quiet, and privacy. Another perk: a guaranteed parking spot near the front door.

Cost

Rentals were originally created as a cheaper option to hotels, and that's often still the case. They're especially cost-effective for large groups and longer stays (but less so for solo travelers and couples).

Comfort

Staying in a rental can almost feel like vacationing at home. For instance, you can cook your own meals and sleep in without room service knocking or neighbors waking you. And since these places are frequently embedded within local communities, you can enjoy a nice neighborly vibe. They also tend to be more pet friendly.

— Negatives

Availability

With rentals, you typically must book well in advance, and if you need to cancel, you may be required to do so weeks or months before your trip or risk losing significant money. Additionally, unlike hotels and their renowned responsiveness, rental owners may not be available at all hours if you need something.

Extra costs

The final bill may end up being much higher than the nightly rate due to cleaning fees and taxes, and you may be dinged for any damage. Plus, there's a different type of associated cost: your own labor. After all, you need to clean up after you cook, make your own bed during your stay, and tidy up to the owner's satisfaction before leaving.

Risk

One final downside about rentals is that there's always a chance a listing's photos are edited, leading to disappointment. In the same vein, a place off the beaten path may feature unwanted guests (bugs), while one in the woods could mean sharing your yard with wildlife. Always make sure to read reviews and ask the owner any questions before committing.

It's been said that home is where the heart is, and that's often true on a trip as well—a homey feeling can make all the difference to how much you enjoy the experience. By carefully considering the pros and cons of your options and doing thorough research, you can make the perfect decision to ensure that you enjoy your getaway to the fullest.

Creative uses for your **GARAGE**

written by **ALLISON GOMES**

For many homeowners, the garage is a largely overlooked space, serving as a place to store everything from their car to holiday decorations to old paint cans. But it doesn't have to be a standalone dumping ground—remove your vehicle, enlist your imagination, and make a few practical upgrades, and it can become a highly functional part of your home. Here are four ideas for transforming this area to better support your lifestyle.



Home office

If your work-from-home experience feels cramped or noisy, your garage can offer a quiet retreat away from distractions. Start simple with essentials like a desk, a comfortable chair, and a soft rug underfoot to cover the hard concrete, adding more items as needed for your workday. You could even consider a total conversion, building a wall to close off the garage door and installing insulation and a mini-split HVAC unit for year-round comfort. Note, however, that if you're doing a major renovation, you'll need to check your local regulations to see if any permits are required. A licensed contractor can help you navigate this process safely and efficiently.

Home gym

Skip the commute and membership fees by creating your own gym right in the garage. Lay down rubber mats to protect your floors and your body, then add equipment—such as free weights, a weight bench, and resistance bands—as well as good lighting to keep your workouts effective and enjoyable. Depending on the size of your space and your fitness goals, you can also add larger items like a treadmill and stationary bike. Other options include a wall mirror to help you check your form and a Bluetooth speaker to keep your energy up with invigorating music. As a bonus, you can open the garage door on sunny days for fresh air and a boost of motivation.



Playroom

Do you need extra room the kids to play? An emptied-out garage could be the perfect spot. Start by ensuring that it is fully clear of any hazards, including stored chemicals, rickety shelving, and oil on the floor. Once that's done, install soft flooring like foam mats over the entire area for comfort and safety, and add storage bins and bean bag chairs around the room for easy organization and soft spots to rest. Throw in a Ping-Pong or pool table, and it will work as a playroom for children and adults alike. And similar to the office, it may be worth closing off the garage and insulating it, making it feel like a true extension of your home's living space.

Workshop

For hobbyists and DIY lovers, a garage workshop can become a creative haven. But rather than just carving out a cramped corner, allow yourself to expand so you can fully embrace the potential of your craft, investing in the appropriate equipment for your niche. A sturdy workbench, for instance, is always a good option. Just make sure it has enough surface space and drawers for your needs, and consider adding wheels to make it easier to move around as your projects demand. Pegboards and crates can also be useful to keep certain tools visible and easily accessible. And don't forget the lighting! Combine bright overhead fixtures with task lamps so you can work at any time of day, whether the garage door is open or closed.

No matter how you choose to transform your garage, the key is making the space suit you and your family. With thoughtful design and a bit of creativity, it may soon become one of your favorite rooms.





MIDJOURNEY

guard your home
**AGAINST
 MOSQUITOES**

written by
ANDRE RIOS

Like clockwork each spring, mosquitoes emerge from the darkness to continue their seemingly endless war against our communities, dooming us to slap our necks every time we step outside and scratch our reddened skin for days after. But you need not fear these purveyors of annoyance! Here are a few steps you can take to help keep them at bay, turning a potential swarm into a smaller, more manageable issue.

Eliminate standing water

A good place to begin your quest is their literal breeding ground: your yard. Water nurtures mosquito eggs so well that in a mere *eight* days, these pests can mature from egg to bloodsucking adult. Don't give them refuge—pour out any standing water from containers, add filtration features to fountains and ponds so the water doesn't remain immobile, and examine your gutters to ensure that they drain sufficiently. Then put away clutter like stray buckets and close open trash bins to prevent them from catching puddles. You may also want to inspect your yard's irrigation and drainage setup, contacting a landscaping service for assistance in eliminating any water accumulation issues.

Install fans

Mosquitoes are weak to more than just a firm slap; they're also feeble flyers, so much so that a decent breeze can send them whirling away. But rather than hope for a windy day when entertaining, add fans to your outdoor gathering space, such as by installing one on your porch ceiling or placing floor models beside your seating. Flick these appliances on, and you'll not only protect your guests from pests but also enjoy some cooling airflow.





Repair bug screens

One of the joys of the sunny seasons is the freedom to open your windows on a beautiful day—a perk that can also reduce air-conditioning costs and even improve indoor air quality. But before you do, inspect any bug screens for tears or holes, repair or replace them accordingly, and install new ones where they are missing. This is notably important in bathrooms and the kitchen, where it may be especially advantageous to let humidity out and some pleasant air in.

Tend a fragrant garden

Did you know that some plants are actually natural deterrents? Dressing your garden with flowers and herbs such as marigold, lavender, rosemary, and catnip can fill your yard with mosquito-repelling scents while also setting a beautifully vibrant and fragrant scene for you to enjoy (another good reason to pop open a window!). Just be sure that you nurture these protective plants properly. If you don't apply mulch or soak them when watering, you can unintentionally create standing water that ends up doing you more harm than good.

Utilize natural treatments

As popular as bug zappers and mosquito traps may be, these products only help mitigate the problem, not prevent it. If you're seeking a truly impactful solution, you can't go wrong with good old-fashioned sprays. Store-bought pesticides are certainly an effective option, but many of them also harm beneficial insects like butterflies and ladybugs. So to simultaneously keep out mosquitoes and protect other wildlife, combine about seven ounces of water, a splash of vodka (yes, really), and about two dozen drops of an essential oil such as lemongrass. Spray this mixture throughout your yard for a powerful deterrent that could turn mosquito season into a far more enjoyable one.



Dressing your garden with flowers and herbs such as marigold, lavender, rosemary, and catnip can fill your yard with mosquito-repelling scents while also setting a beautifully vibrant and fragrant scene for you to enjoy.



SIMPLIFY *your meals*

interview with **EMILY LEY**
written by **MATTHEW BRADY**
recipes by **EMILY LEY**

Recipes from *The Simplified Cookbook*
by Emily Ley. Thomas Nelson, 2025.
Photography by Kris D'Amico, Whitney
Hawkins, and Carly Tanner.



Emily Ley, twelve-time author and founder of the popular lifestyle brand Simplified, offers organizational insights, discusses her new cookbook, and shares delicious recipes from it.

What was your life like growing up?

My mom and dad both worked outside the house, but it was important to them that we all ate dinner together every night. They and my brother are fantastic cooks; they can whip something up with whatever they have. However, that just wasn't interesting to me. Then I had my own family and realized that maybe I should have learned.

The kitchen has always been a challenge because I'd want to quickly give up if it wasn't going to be *just right*. So part of the process of writing my cookbook was untangling myself from that.

Does a messy home stress you out?

I'm glad you asked! People often assume that I have an eternally perfect house, but I'm living the same chaotic life as everyone else. As a recovering perfectionist and overachiever, I would really like my home to be magazine-photography worthy at any given moment; that's not realistic, though, because people actually *live* here. So it's all about being OK with things being messy, resetting, and then getting organized.

I've also found that as you get older, you just don't care as much; instead, you realize that home is a place where you should always feel like you can be yourself, and sometimes that's not possible in a perfect setting. In fact, allowing it to be a little undone lets you feel like *you* can be a little undone: that is, human. My favorite type of friend is the one who will either simply show up at my house and not care what it looks like or invite me to hers while admitting that it's a disaster. She just wants me there—that's what living's all about.

What inspired you to finally write a Simplified cookbook?

The Simplified Cookbook actually started as a joke. I kiddingly told my publisher that somebody needed to write a book that would help people like me, who don't want to cook and feel like they should get a trophy when they do. I said that it needed to include stupid-easy meals: stuff that everybody's going to love and you can get on the table fast.

This idea stayed alive for two years, and then they finally asked me to write it by shortening my own favorite dishes. I aimed for a goal of six ingredients or fewer and fifteen minutes or less of prep time for each recipe, which I hit for most of them—and that didn't come easily to me. This was the hardest book yet for me to write, and I'm proud of how it came out.

In the book, you call the recipes "healthy-ish." What does this mean, and how do you achieve it?

You can spin your wheels forever trying to find something that's super healthy, easy to make, and going to please everyone, so I primarily use two rules. First, I live by the 80/20 rule of making great choices, like veggies, 80 percent of the time and indulging in, say, french fries or going the easy route with canned condensed soup the rest. I also follow a three-quarters rule: choose four generally wholesome goals for every meal and try to hit three of them. As long as I stick to these rules, I feel pretty good.



What's your favorite go-to tool for meal planning?

Assembly meals. I used to think I had to have an elaborate system on Sundays, when I would get everything planned out and organized perfectly for the week. Some people really thrive doing that, which is awesome. But instead I loosely write down what we're going to have for about four meals a week and then fill in the rest with leftovers, going out to eat, ordering in, etc. It's all about showing yourself grace and figuring out what works best for you and your situation.

You used the word grace. Do you think many people have the feeling of "not good enough" in the kitchen?

Oh, a thousand percent. In general, people are under more pressure than ever before these days, especially women. I had truly believed that to be successful in the kitchen, I needed to be like my family, who just naturally come up with amazing meals every week to make. It's another reason why I wanted this cookbook to be out there.

Some may think your book is only geared toward young families. What would you say in response?

I'm so glad you asked that because ever since I wrote my first book, it's been super important to me to appeal to people who aren't like me. The most meaningful reviews I've received for this cookbook are from those who said they weren't sure if it would speak to them but realized after picking it up that it provided everything they needed to feed themselves, themselves and their partner, or their family. It's truly for anyone who likes to eat.

For more info, visit emilyley.com
And check out recipes from Emily's cookbook starting on the next page!



PHOTO CREDIT: KRIS D'AMICO, WHITNEY HAWKINS, AND CARLY TANNER

Servings
4

chopped **GREEK SALAD**

This salad is great for make-ahead lunches or for serving to a crowd. Add shredded chicken or chopped salami for some extra protein.

Ingredients:

- 2 cucumbers
- $\frac{1}{2}$ red onion
- 1 cup grape tomatoes
- 1 cup pitted kalamata olives
- 1 cup crumbled feta cheese
- Greek salad dressing, to taste

Instructions:

- 1/ Chop the cucumbers, tomatoes, and red onion into bite-size pieces. Place in a medium bowl.
- 2/ Drain the olives. Add olives and feta cheese to the bowl.
- 3/ Toss to combine. Top with your favorite store-bought or homemade Greek salad dressing, with plenty of vanilla custard.

TIP

There are a number of wonderful premade salad dressings out there. If you have a jar and a few extra minutes, try making your own. This recipe was my grandmother's go-to and I can promise you, it will not disappoint: simply combine equal parts vegetable oil, white vinegar, and sugar (or sugar substitute). I like to add a little salt and pepper to my salad, but you can also add those straight into the dressing.

Servings
4 to 6

coca-cola POT ROAST

I swear my mom shared this recipe with me, but she also swears she doesn't put Coca-Cola in her pot roast. I, however, do! And I think if you try this, it'll become your go-to pot roast recipe. It's so easy that I can throw it together while making lunches on a busy school morning.

Ingredients:

3 to 4-lb. chuck roast
1 yellow onion
1 (16 oz.) bag baby carrots
1 lb. small potatoes
1 (12 oz.) can Coca-Cola
1 (2 oz.) packet onion soup mix

Instructions:

- 1/ Spray your slow cooker with nonstick cooking spray or use a liner (you'll thank me when it's time to clean the slow cooker).
- 2/ Quarter onion and halve potatoes.
- 3/ Put chuck roast, onion, carrots, and potatoes in slow cooker. Add Coca-Cola and onion soup mix.
- 4/ Cover and cook on low for 6 to 8 hours.

PHOTO CREDIT: KRIS D'AMICO, WHITNEY HAWKINS, AND CARLY TANNER



What Kind of Home Organizer Are You?

written by **ANDRE RIOS**

Homes throughout the country are as varied as America itself, and each one perfectly represents the unique people that occupy it. So what does yours say about you?

Take the quiz to identify your organization style—and learn how to make the best of your truest tendencies.



While getting dressed to go out, I:

- A.** Browse my choices on their hangers or shelves
- B.** Move a few things around as I brainstorm outfits
- C.** Leave what I don't choose to wear piled on a chair or bench
- D.** Try on all kinds of combinations and deal with the mess later



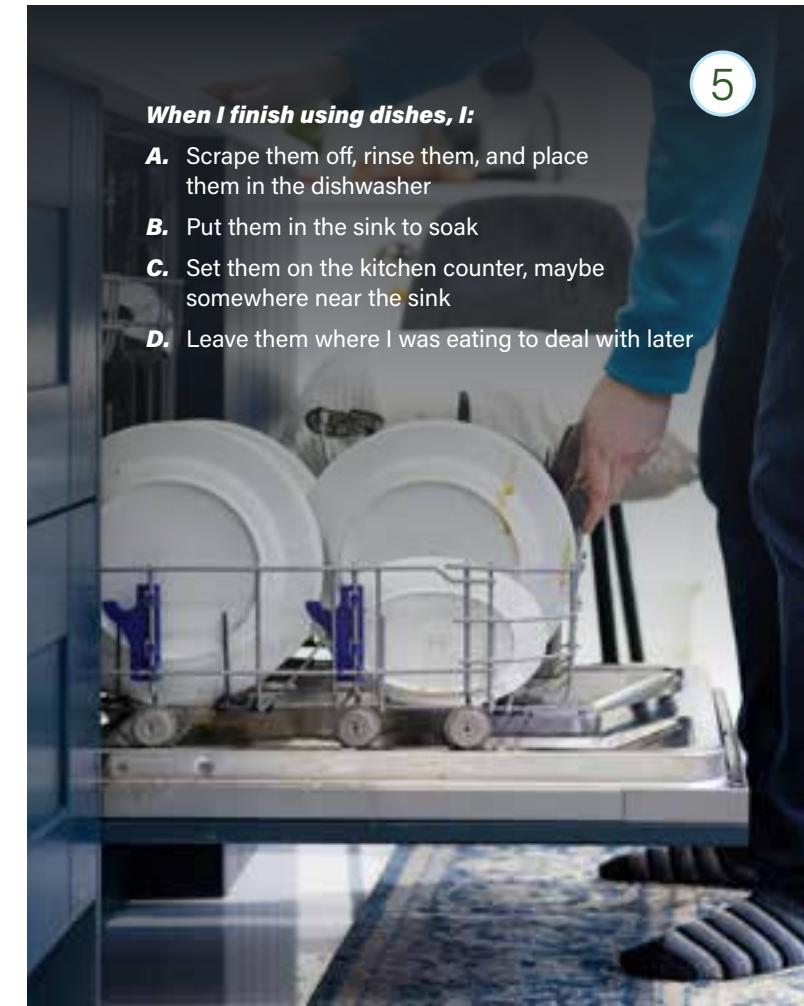
I think a stylish living room is one that's:

- A.** Neat, trendy, sophisticated, and downright impressive
- B.** Clean and nicely arranged but still relaxed
- C.** Attuned to my lifestyle and favorite hobbies
- D.** Unfussy and lived-in, filled with all the things that make me happy



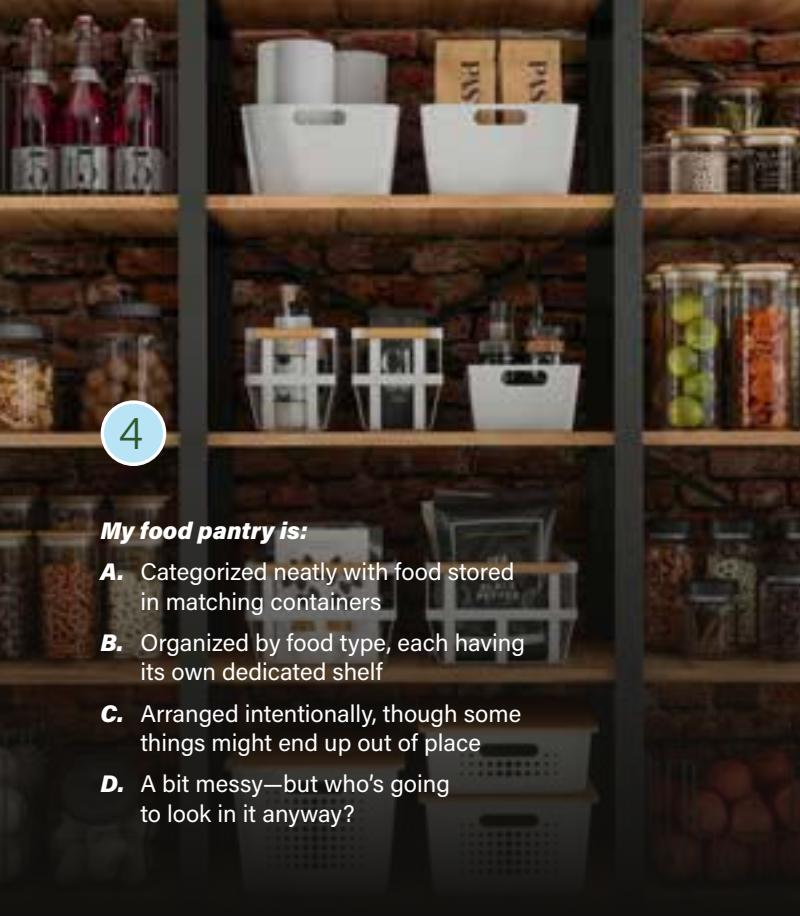
When I want to set a drink down, I:

- A.** Always use a coaster because I have to protect my investments!
- B.** Only use coasters for delicate surfaces like wood
- C.** Will use a coaster if it's within reach
- D.** Put it down wherever I want; it's my home, after all



When I finish using dishes, I:

- A.** Scrape them off, rinse them, and place them in the dishwasher
- B.** Put them in the sink to soak
- C.** Set them on the kitchen counter, maybe somewhere near the sink
- D.** Leave them where I was eating to deal with later



4

My food pantry is:

- A.** Categorized neatly with food stored in matching containers
- B.** Organized by food type, each having its own dedicated shelf
- C.** Arranged intentionally, though some things might end up out of place
- D.** A bit messy—but who's going to look in it anyway?



My home desk is:

- A.** Clear of any clutter, with supplies arranged neatly
- B.** Decorated to feel fun and engaging with everything in its place
- C.** A pretty laid-back spot where I can get some tasks done
- D.** Where I store my chargers and junk mail



My bathroom counter looks like a:

- A.** Magazine-ready space adorned with a decorative plant or candle
- B.** Collection of fun beauty products and decor I enjoy
- C.** Relatively clean surface (just don't look in my medicine cabinet!)
- D.** Practical space with all my toiletries within reach



When I change my clothes after a long day, I:

- A.** Put them all in the appropriate hamper or closet
- B.** Toss them in a bin but don't necessarily hang up what I plan to reuse
- C.** Drop them in the laundry room or closet so I can go relax
- D.** Leave them right on my bedroom floor—I want to sit and unwind ASAP!



The Results

Tally your score based on letter, find which color category you fall into, and then discover more about your organizing personality.

Almost all As and Bs: Red

More Cs and Ds: Green

More As and Bs: Yellow

Almost all Cs and Ds: Blue

Red

Your home is your realm, and like the color red, you're passionate about how it looks and feels. You aim to not only keep each room clean and organized but also craft your spaces to evoke feelings of sophistication through eye-catching design. To achieve this lofty goal, you run a tight ship, holding both yourself and your loved ones to a high standard.

For consistent order without conflict, arrange a detailed cleaning schedule so everyone can chip in. Tackling just one room at a time or one major task per day (e.g., sorting laundry) can help take the stress out of the ongoing work of staying neat. But keep in mind that you may need to let go of perfectionism—whether for yourself or for others—especially during busier periods. Releasing this pressure can allow you to appreciate your home as a work in progress and accept that living comfortably may mean being a tad messy sometimes.

Yellow

Your approach to home care is as positive as this sunny color itself: fairly particular but not to a degree that makes you sweat. Everything has its place, and you recognize that spaces feel that much brighter when they're neat.

You probably already have good home organization skills, but to enhance your abode's cheery vibe even more, aim to get ahead of the clutter that tends to build up over time. Devote a spot, such as in the garage or laundry room, to collecting unwanted, broken, expired, and outdated items from around the house, and aim to clear them out once a month. You'll love the extra space and breezy ambience such a strategy helps create, including in your typical go-to storage areas.

Green

As with outdoor enthusiasts, you prefer to let your environment lead the way rather than strictly dictating your surroundings. For example, you may feel that the kitchen and bathroom need to be clean and tidy in order to feel sanitary, but because the living room and bedrooms are for relaxing, they can handle a little more cozy clutter.

Home organization is about convenience for you, and improving your approach involves making such tasks feel more like natural parts of your routine. Try placing storage bins under your TV, swapping shelved furniture with concealing cabinets, and setting a hamper beside your bathtub. These efforts could make it simpler for you to stay consistently neat, enabling your entire home to feel more charming throughout.

Blue

If you belong in this category, you may have other priorities and passions beyond home decor and cleaning. Fitting of the relaxed vibes of the color blue, your chief domestic concerns are mostly about comfort—why should remotes, chargers, pajamas, and other everyday essentials be tucked away when it's more convenient to leave them within reach?

You might find chores to be taxing, but here is some motivation to stay on top of them: remember that your home is a major investment, and to safeguard the equity you hold in it, you'll need to keep it in solid shape. For starters, devote at least an hour each weekend to tackling basic cleaning and organizing, relying on hacks like using a robot vacuum and electric scrubber and working to a soundtrack of great music to keep you energized. You'll be surprised by how quickly new habits form after just a few consistent sessions.

A Regal RHODE ISLAND *Retreat*

Seth Ballard, founder of Washington, DC-based Ballard + Mensua Architecture, discusses a grand renovation he did for a couple's property overlooking Narragansett Bay.

interview with SETH BALLARD
written by MATTHEW BRADY
photography by STACY ZARIN GOLDBERG



Have you always been interested in architecture?

As a kid, I wanted to be a fireman. But when I was seven, I visited the National Gallery of Art's East Building and was blown away—everything had so much order. My parents, knowing that I loved drawing, explained what an architect is and what they do. I immediately wanted to be one, and the feeling never wavered.

What led you to open your firm twenty years ago?

I worked for well-known architect Douglas Soe Lin for eleven years, building everything from resorts in Southeast Asia to country clubs and office buildings in the States. But I wanted to focus more on residential architecture, and, on top of that, I wasn't seeing my young kids enough. So I started my own firm.

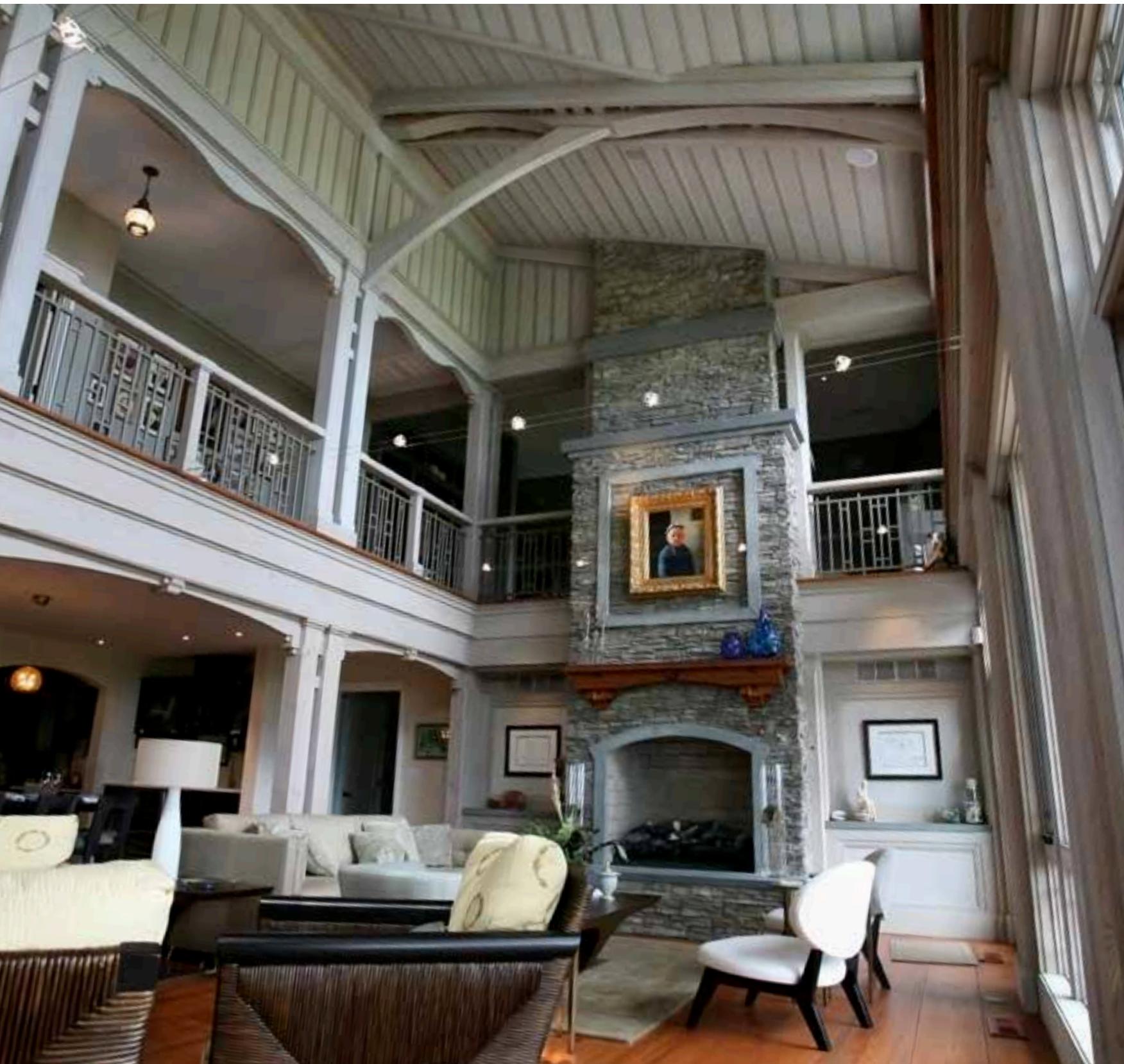
How did you get involved with this project? What were the clients' goals?

I've been friends and worked with Bill and Tina for years; they're quite a couple. Bill's a commercial real estate developer and Tina's the daughter of one, and both have backgrounds in construction. When their boys relocated to New England, they started looking at real estate in Rhode Island so they'd have a place nearby.

They found this house on a beautiful four-acre lot on the water and wanted me to make it like a private bed-and-breakfast—complete with seven en suite bedrooms and three bars—because they entertain so many friends. I appreciate how much faith they had in me, allowing me to shop for everything from the furniture, art, and paint right down to the dishes and linens.



THEY FOUND THIS HOUSE ON A BEAUTIFUL FOUR-ACRE LOT ON THE WATER AND WANTED ME TO MAKE IT LIKE A PRIVATE BED-AND-BREAKFAST



What was the home's original style?

It was a late sixties/early seventies hodgepodge with very minimal trim and a mix of flat and angled roofs—and it felt very much that dated. Ultimately, we ripped out the roof, most of the walls, the plumbing, and all the wiring and basically used the remaining structure as a starting point. We then created additions up and all around it, swallowing it within them to make the great room.

How did the water setting influence your design?

We wanted the home to feel like a big ocean liner because it overlooks vast Narragansett Bay. For instance, we weathered seasoned timber with a coastal color for a driftwood feel and sculpted waves in it, making it look like hand-hewn ship beams. We also incorporated other nautical details, such as round windows, copper lights, a ship-style railing above the garage, and two stories of glass in the great room. You can even walk across what feels like a bridge on the upper level.

Were the exterior choices based on withstanding bayside elements?

Yes, but Bill and Tina wanted authentic, historically correct materials as well, so I pulled inspiration from New England. The pergola's timber frame is western red cedar, for example, which we stained to make it long-lasting, while the garage doors are custom mahogany and the roofing is slate and copper for beauty and durability. Similarly, the flagstone and bluestone around the perimeter are maintenance-free, and the subterranean patio is made out of Nantucket Stacked Stone; I designed the latter with civil engineers to withstand a hundred-year storm.



The octagon tower is breathtaking. Would you discuss it?

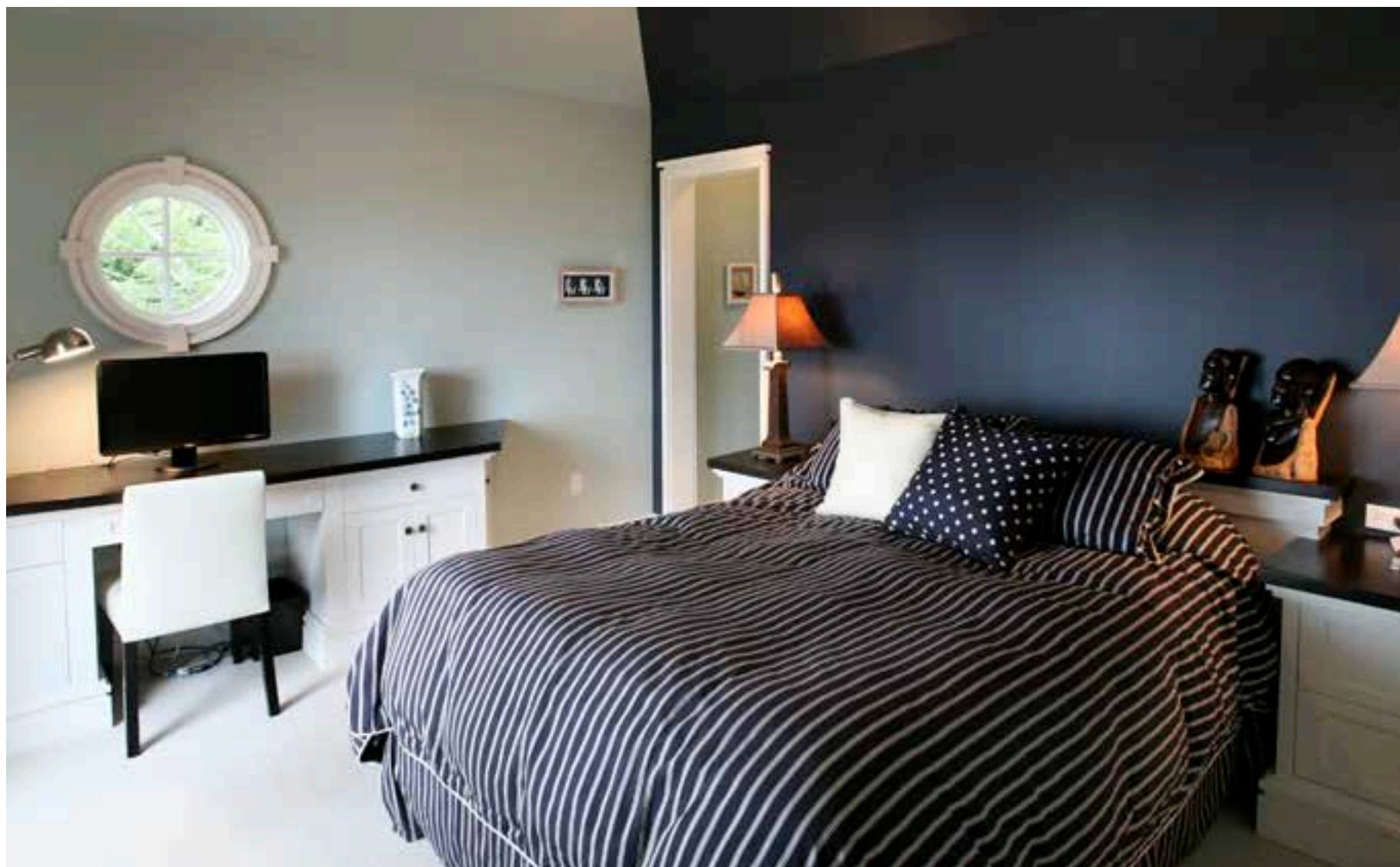
The tower offers a water view on every side but one, and each level and room has something special. On the lowest level, for example, visitors can step out onto the beautiful 1,000-square-foot patio. But Bill and Tina's bedroom in the middle level is the biggest highlight of all because when you're in it, you're surrounded by water and the beautiful rolling hills of Barrington; you can even see a lighthouse in the distance. In fact, many guests paint that scene because it's so picturesque.

So the project's name, All Points of View, is appropriate—for both the spectacular vista in all directions and how Bill and Tina are very welcoming to everybody. They used to host guests 300 out of 365 days a year in this house before retiring there.

You mentioned the home now being like a B and B. How did you achieve this?

Every guest room has a built-in desk, dedicated luggage area, and en suite bathroom with two sinks. We also included a wing above the garage with colorful children-oriented spaces that are still welcoming for adults. It features custom bunk beds and window seats, a play zone for young kids, and a separate area where older ones can play video games. Such details make guests very comfortable, knowing how much thought the owners put into their stay.

I SEE MY JOB AS BEING [THE CLIENT'S] EDITOR, MAKING SURE THERE'S TASTEFULNESS WITHIN THE REALM OF WHAT THEY WANT.



Is it challenging to craft homes that are grand yet welcoming?

The main reason this dichotomy fails in such houses is because they have no scale, resulting in a cold, lifeless furniture layout. That's why we always make plans with proportion and scale top of mind. So in this house, you want to sit and relax, not only because of the view but also because the furniture is comfortable and lets you sink into it and there's ample space between each piece, creating a cozier environment within the larger environment.

Do you also consider all points of view when you do a job?

Yes—it's a natural fit. I credit my family for instilling that in me from a young age as well as Douglas, my mentor. He'd never go against a client's wishes, which is smart because they're proud of their ideas and won't like or trust you if you push back too hard. Instead, I'll say something like "We could definitely do that" but keep drawing and then show them what it could be. They'll often like my option better since I took the genesis of their vision and remolded it using expert principles.

Overall, I see my job as being their editor, making sure there's tastefulness within the realm of what they want. To do so, I need an open mind to receive their input, give it proper scale, proportion, and color balance, and synthesize everything for them. Only by considering all these points of view can I create their dream house.

For more info, visit ballardmensua.com

all about **Window Coverings**

written by **ALLISON GOMES**



When it comes to designing your interiors, the finishing touches often bring everything together. Take window coverings, for example. These fixtures do more than block sunlight—they can also set the tone for a space, offer privacy, and even improve your home's energy efficiency. But with so many types to choose from, picking the right one for each room can feel overwhelming. To help make the selection process easier, here's a breakdown of popular window treatments and where you might want to use each one.

Curtains and drapes

The most traditional and versatile options, these coverings come in an incredibly wide range of fabrics, colors, and patterns, instantly adding softness and style no matter which you select. Drapes and curtains are virtually the same, but there are two key differences between them—the former are lined and are generally thicker and heavier, characteristics that may lend a more formal or dramatic look.

Consider drapes for your bedroom, opting for ones in a heavy velvet; hang them at least four to six inches above your window, and ensure that they are long enough to touch the floor. On top of setting a cozy tone, they will provide more seclusion and block light for an optimal sleeping environment. Meanwhile, lighter, sheer curtains are a great choice for areas where you may want to let some natural light in while still maintaining a bit of privacy, such as living rooms and kitchens.

Blinds

Blinds are a practical, low-maintenance choice for numerous areas in your home. Horizontal styles are appealing for bedrooms, offices, and kitchens, where you may frequently want to adjust the amount of natural light and privacy without having to deal with bulky drapes or curtains. However, they can be difficult to lower and raise on tall and wide windows, making vertical slats more ideal. Such blinds are also more suitable for sliding doors since they're often on a track system and will move side to side with the door.

The possible materials to select from are plentiful, including wood, faux wood, vinyl, and aluminum, and be just as mindful of the hues. Blinds in neutral tones, for instance, can help a space feel clean and modern, especially when matched to your trim or wall color.



Shades

These fabric-based coverings roll, fold, or stack up when raised, providing a similar softness to curtains and drapes but the convenience of easier maneuverability and light filtering like blinds. These are the most popular types:

- **Roman shades** bring a tailored, elegant appearance to dining rooms and bedrooms since they fold neatly into pleats.
- **Cellular or honeycomb shades** can boost insulation and energy efficiency, making them a smart pick for sunny rooms or those with drafty windows.
- **Roller shades** are sleek and minimal, perfect for modern spaces and small rooms where you don't want any added bulk.
- **Solar shades** are just like roller options, but they also filter harmful UV rays while allowing for different transparency levels.



Blinds in neutral tones help a space feel clean and modern, especially when matched to your trim or wall color.





Mixing styles with your window coverings, like pairing blinds with sheer curtains, creates a more elegant feel in a space.

Shutters

As permanent fixtures, interior shutters are often more expensive than other window coverings but are built to last. Even better, they can also increase the value of your home—in fact, according to This Old House, they have an estimated 75 percent return on investment. Plus, the wood or composite materials are incredibly easy to clean. Offering excellent light control, insulation, and privacy, shutters may work best in living rooms, bedrooms, and bathrooms, and their classic look fits both traditional and contemporary designs.

Layered treatments

Sometimes the best solution is a combination of treatments. For instance, pairing sheer curtains with wood blinds in a bedroom gives you the ability to leave the blinds open for extra light but pull the curtains for some privacy during the day. Or try mounting Roman shades under velvet drapes for a comfy, multifaceted look in a living room or home office. Mixing styles in this way creates more elegance in spaces and gives you greater control than you'd otherwise have with just a singular option.

Whether you want to frame a view, block out the morning sun, or add texture to your space, the right window covering can elevate any room. Consider your needs for light, privacy, and style, and don't be afraid to mix and match for a personalized touch that's both beautiful and functional.



RECYCLING *dos and don'ts*

written by **ANDRE RIOS**

Sorting your trash responsibly can not only clear your home of clutter but also make a difference for the environment, helping preserve our planet for generations to come. Follow these guidelines to initiate or improve your personal recycling process.

DO keep bins handy

For an easy way to make it a habit, set up an additional bin beside your trash can for simple curbside recyclables—think cardboard, dry paper products, glass, and tin cans. It might also be useful to have a designated spot for goods that need a special program, such as reusable plastic containers and electronics.

DON'T ignore the symbol

Plastic items will generally feature the famous triangle containing a number; this indicates the type of plastic used. For example, those with the number 1 (e.g., most soft drink bottles) are made from polyethylene terephthalate, while those with the number 5 (e.g., food containers) are made from polypropylene. Processing of these items varies by municipality.

DO remember the other two Rs

Equally important as recycling are the two other tenets of this widely shared directive: reduce and reuse. Challenge yourself to purchase fewer single-use plastic products overall, which are often the trickiest to recycle, and repurpose items when possible.

DON'T forget to donate

On that note, another way to give clothes, electronics, and certain home supplies new life is to donate them. Reach out to local shelters, donation centers, and other services to determine what they may need. You can also gift old fabrics like bedding to animal shelters.

DO contact your local service

Recycling can look different depending on where you live. Even simple-to-process items like glass may not be taken everywhere, and some rural areas may not have access to these services at all. Call your city or county sanitation department to get detailed information about which materials are accepted and where to drop them off in person, if needed.

For more info, visit epa.gov/recycle



BAKED FRENCH ONION SOUP

with gruyère topping



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Connie Wood Miller, REALTOR®

Direct: (469) 690-6619

Email: cmiller@pioneer-realty.com

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SERVES 4

BAKED FRENCH ONION SOUP *with gruyère topping*

INGREDIENTS

5 tbsp. extra virgin olive oil

2 lb. 4 oz. onions, thinly sliced

2 garlic cloves, finely chopped

2 tsp. freshly chopped thyme

½ c. fruity red wine

4 c. vegetable stock

½ French baguette

⅔ c. grated Gruyère

2 tbsp. grated Parmesan

Sea salt and freshly ground pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

1/ Preheat the oven to 400°F.

2/ Heat the oil in a 4-qt. Dutch oven over a medium heat and gently fry the onions, garlic and thyme with a little salt and pepper for 25 minutes until really soft and lightly golden, stirring frequently to prevent the onions from burning.

3/ Add the wine, bring to the boil and boil for 5 minutes or until evaporated, then pour in the stock. Bring back to the boil and season to taste.

4/ Cut the bread into slices ½ in. thick and arrange over the top of the soup. Scatter over the Gruyère and Parmesan cheeses and transfer the pan to the preheated oven. Bake uncovered for about 10–15 minutes until the soup is bubbling and the cheese melted and golden. If you wish, you can brown the top of the cheese under a hot broiler/grill.

5/ Cool for 10 minutes before serving.

HOW TO MAKE A ROOM FEEL ROOMIER

Whether you are selling your home or simply have an itch to redecorate, these easy design and organization tips can make even the smallest rooms in your home feel bigger and better.



PURGE FURNITURE - A room overcrowded with furniture can feel tight. Increase your floor space by replacing bulky items with dual-purpose furniture. For instance, an ottoman can also function as a coffee table.



LIGHTEN UP - When it comes to choosing paint colors, go for a bright hue that reflects light to instantly make the room feel larger. Dark colors can make a space feel small, even if it's not.



LOOK IN THE MIRROR - Mirrors reflect the light in a room, giving the appearance of a more open space. For maximum impact, hang them on walls opposite any windows or large light sources like floor lamps.



MAKE CURTAIN CALLS - Make your windows appear larger by mounting curtain rods close to the ceiling. For the illusion of even more space, opt for a patterned curtain, which will draw the eye.



GET OFF THE GROUND - Furniture raised off the ground by legs can allow more light to flow through the room, making it feel airy and more spacious. Avoid heavy furniture such as oversized sofas with skirting that interrupts the line of sight.



Connie Wood Miller, REALTOR®

Direct: (469) 690-6619

Email: cmiller@pioneer-realty.com

conniewmiller.com



PIONEER
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Email: cmiller@pioneer-realty.com

conniewmiller.com

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SERVES 6

SUPER BOWLS

BOWLS:

- Nonstick cooking spray
- 12 (6-in.) corn or flour tortillas, cut in half to form 24 half circles
- Salt, to taste

FILLINGS:

Use any combination of the following depending on your preferences!

- Ground beef, chicken, or other protein, cooked
- Black beans or bean dip
- Salsa
- Sour cream
- Guacamole
- Cheese
- Tomatoes
- Onions
- Scallions
- Cilantro, finely chopped
- Jalapeños, sliced

GAME PLAN:

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F. Coat the cups of two muffin tins with the cooking spray, using a paper towel to ensure even cover.
2. Fold each tortilla in half inward to form a cone. The straight portion of the circle will form the pointed bottom, while the rounded portion will form the lip of the bowl.
3. Put each cone into a cup in the muffin tin, pressing with your index finger to form it into a flat-bottomed bowl with a large lip that hangs slightly over the edges.
4. Sprinkle the tortilla bowls with a few drops of water, and press each into the tin once more to help hold the shape. Finish with a sprinkle of salt.
5. Bake for 10–15 minutes or until golden brown. While the tortilla bowls are baking, prep the ingredients that you would like to use for fillings.
6. Let the muffin tins cool, then remove each tortilla bowl and set aside.
7. Fill your tortilla bowls with your fillings of choice, and enjoy!

