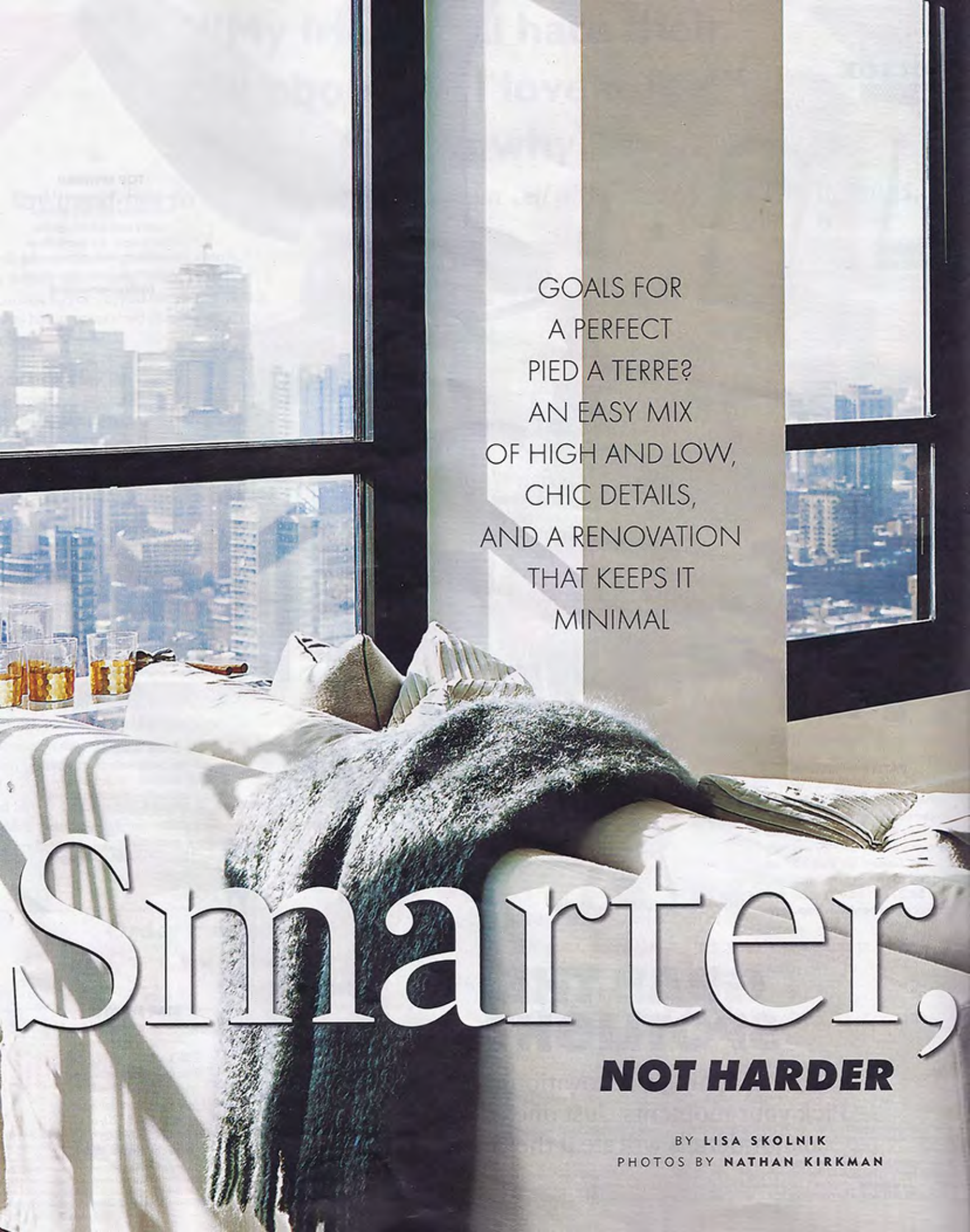


Trib

FEBRUARY, 2016



THE RELAXED RENOVATION



GOALS FOR
A PERFECT
PIED A TERRE?
AN EASY MIX
OF HIGH AND LOW,
CHIC DETAILS,
AND A RENOVATION
THAT KEEPS IT
MINIMAL

Smarter, **NOT HARDER**

BY LISA SKOLNIK
PHOTOS BY NATHAN KIRKMAN





inding the right home,

then making it work for your family, takes foresight and forbearance. Austin transplants Becky and Jim Urhausen channeled both when they bought a three-bedroom aerie in Newberry Plaza for their frequent visits back home to Chicago. ■ "We wanted to have the best location and views possible, so we looked at everything and weighed all our options," explains Becky. Contenders included newer buildings with much higher prestige-quotients than Newberry Plaza, which was built in 1974 but still possessed impressive assets compared to the competition.

"Besides trendy retailers and hot restaurants, Oak St. beach is only a few blocks away," points out Becky. "And while the condo was dated, it had three bedrooms instead of two for the same price and the most incredible views of any apartment we saw. We knew we could make it fabulous with the right updates."

Which didn't mean stripping the place to the studs. Strategic thinking was essential given the Urhausens' big wants and needs. Jim is here twice a month, and Becky, their eight-year-old twin boys and friends from Texas visit frequently — especially during winter and summer holidays. So the condo had to include the usual main living areas, a retreat for Jim, entertaining spaces for Becky, room to play for the boys and enough beds to sleep guests.

When the Urhausens' longtime Austin interior design team was too busy to handle the job for at least six months, Becky was equally strategic in her search to find a local firm. She collected names from tony local home furnishings stores and stories in Chicago design publications, and then perused their websites. At Studio Gild's site, she felt she had found her match.

"I loved the diversity of the projects and their mix-and-match aesthetic. Everything they've done feels so innovative and original," says Becky. A face-to-face with the firm's partners, Kristen Ekeland, Melissa Benham and Jennie Bishop, sealed the union. "They were talented, charming and had a simpatico approach to ours," says Becky.

That approach focused on appropriately scaled changes: Conserving what they could, revamping the really bad, exploiting every square inch of space and using furnishings to maximize function and enhance the views.

Elements worth saving were the handsome oak floors — still perfect decades later; perfectly fine bi-fold closet doors brought up to date with chic Spinneybeck leather

loop pulls in lieu of dated metal knobs; and bathroom and kitchen cabinets that were given new hardware and in some instances refaced.

The designers weren't so eager to salvage intrusive track lighting, tacky Formica kitchen and bathroom countertops and ersatz French doors in two of the bedrooms that weren't original to the place, notes Ekeland. The latter wrought the most substantial structural changes.

"The French doors in the boys' bedroom were one of two entrances to the room and led into a dining area. By closing them off we were able to gain more play space in their room and create a formal dining area," explains the designer. The second set of French doors, in what became Jim's man cave, was replaced with a smaller opening and slim pocket door that didn't hog the hallway.

The Formica counters were a breeze to swap out with sumptuous stones that went far to update their respective environments. In the kitchen, sleek white Macauba quartzite countertops were paired with a ceramic subway tile backsplash in smoky gray, while the charcoal Grigio limestone counters in the bathroom were topped with a glamorous mirror from Restoration Hardware.

But alternatives to the track lighting proved tricky thanks to the limitations of the apartment's existing junction boxes. "We designed a custom canopy in the dining room that allowed us to center light over the table, but used lamps and sconces everywhere else to make ceilings seem higher and keep sightlines to the view outside clear," explains Ekeland.

The designers used thoughtful space planning and smart furnishings to achieve the rest of the Urhausens' goals.

A pair of Restoration Hardware sofas divide the living room into two zones, creating a communal seating area and leaving a niche in a window-clad corner for a pair of spare yet cushy Lawson-Fenning lounge chairs that can be placed in any direction to capture the views. Trim banquettes from Covers Unlimited offer maximum seats but use a minimum amount of floor space, and a Saarinen-inspired oval tulip table from Organic Modernism, optimizes function. A pair of custom mirrors from Seaberg Picture Framing amplify the space. And everything is upholstered in indoor-outdoor fabrics and faux leather to be kid-proof.

In the master bedroom, an upholstered Covers Unlimited headboard paired with a Restoration Hardware frame and Lawson-Fenning nightstands makes a major statement, yet still leaves space in the room for a trim Room & Board desk, a sexy shagreen Made Goods dresser and a cushy Moroso quilted velvet chair. Duc Duc twin beds, set end-on-end, leave plenty of floor space for play in the twins' room and trundles allow each to have a guest. And the third bedroom does triple-duty as a den for the entire family (complete with a big-screen TV), a man cave for Jim and a guest room that sleeps two on a pullout Crate & Barrel sofa.

Today, the Urhausens are making great use of the clever mix of high-and-low solutions and furnishings Studio Gild prescribed as the perfect remedy for their place in Chicago. In fact, the homeowners took note that, while the approach made sense for a second home, it also yielded far more interesting and compelling results than they had achieved in their prior homes. For that reason, "we're using Studio Gild to do a new house we're building in Austin. I just got their plane tickets," says Betsy. Now, that's smart. ■



From top left: Custom mirrors provide a crisp line above the Saarinen-inspired table while a banquette provides a perch with a view; sleek details such as the Lawson-Fenning lounge chairs keep the space smart, skipping second-home clichés; a rustic chair chosen by the homeowners provides counterpoint to chic upholstery; sconces with an industrial feel add more edge to the mix



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We knew
we could
make it
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with
the right
updates.
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