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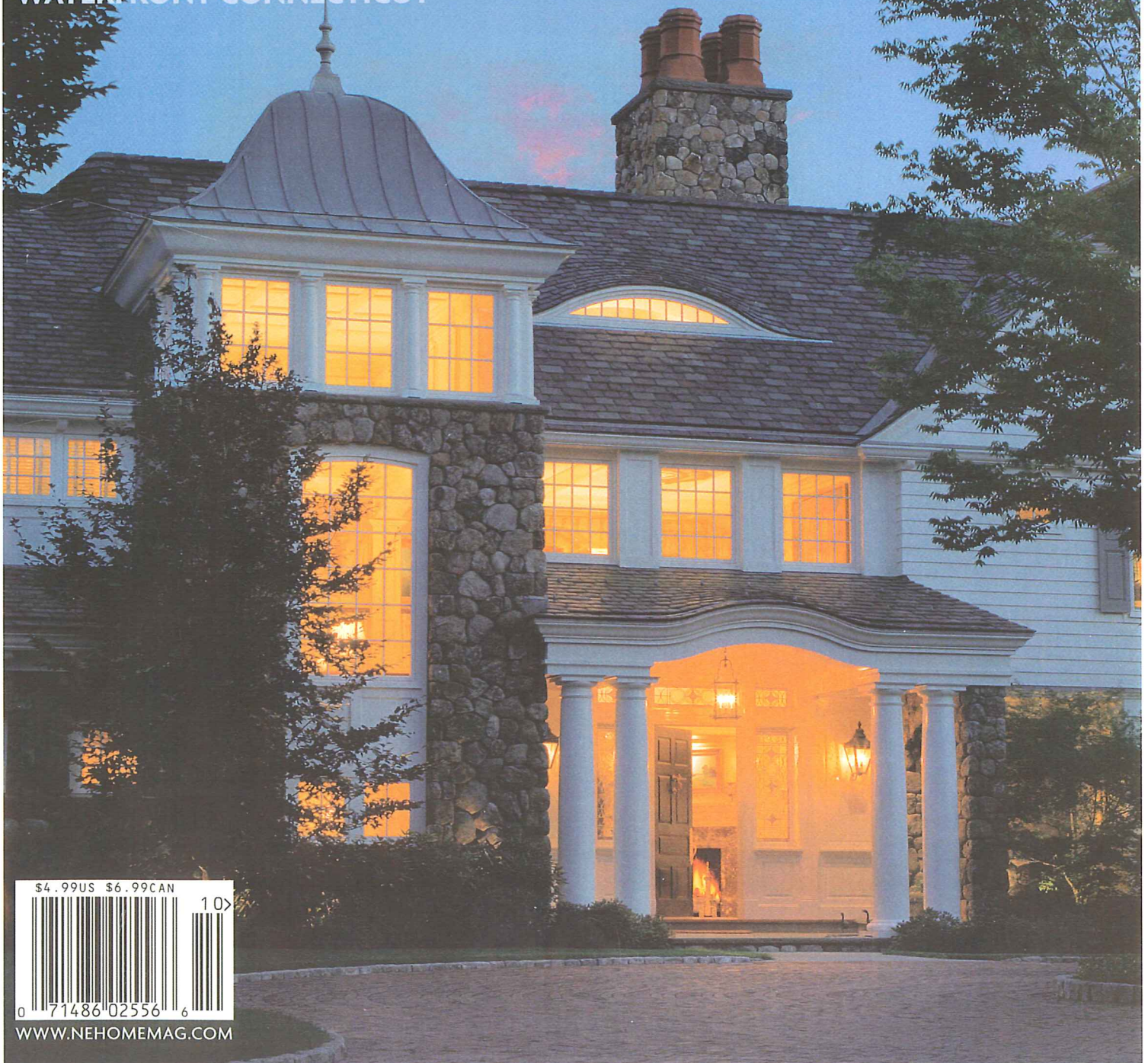
CELEBRATING FINE DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2005

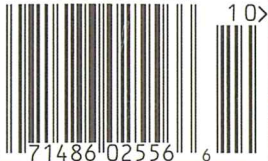
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Next Stop Copley Square

In search of serenity, movie producer Mitchell Robbins put together a team of like-minded collaborators to create a Zen-like quality for his Back Bay apartment.

TEXT BY MEGAN FULWEILER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD MANDELKORN
ARCHITECT: PETER SOLLOGUB | DESIGNER: MAHO ABE

In an urban area like Boston's Back Bay, where some of the best condominiums struggle with cramped rooms and no light, a spacious apartment—especially one with a private terrace—is a coveted jewel. Even better, this 3,000-square-foot open and airy hideaway belonging to real estate developer and movie producer Mitchell Robbins and his wife, Alison, has been meticulously designed to nourish the senses and the soul.

Robbins, producer of the 1998 romantic comedy *Next Stop Wonderland*, was a bachelor when he fell head-over-heels in love with the place. Swept away by the spectacular



LEFT: High-style lighting fixtures are integral to the overall design. Varying ceiling heights also add interest. THIS PAGE: Shoji screen-like doors provide privacy when needed.



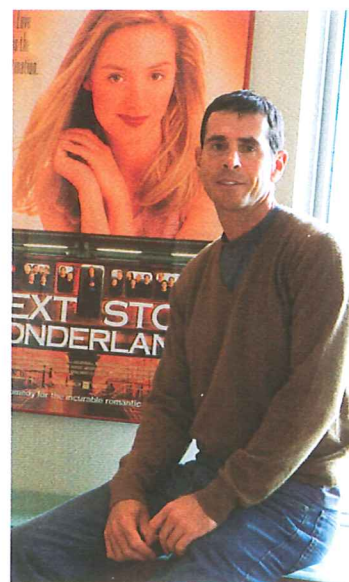
Monitors in every room make for easy viewing. Custom storage units beneath the window mimic a mechanical grill. Comfortable, contemporary furniture—primarily Italian—is in sync with the apartment's upbeat tone.

views of Copley Square and its landmark buildings, he purchased the property and recruited prominent Boston-based architect Peter Sollogub, a principal of Chermayeff, Sollogub and Poole, and interior designer Maho Abe of the Sudbury, Massachusetts, company Zen Associates to help create what he refers to as “a contemporary New York-style loft with a Zen-like quality.”

Robbins says he was interested in forging more than just a comfortable spot to live. Instead, he envisioned “a whole lifestyle.”

Abe’s sensibilities are well-attuned to the beauty that arises from unadorned spaces, from natural materials and strong, simple shapes—all of which the owner was after. Still, the project was not as effortless as the final results would have us believe. The existing three-bedroom unit first had to be totally gutted, and then a number of struc-

Movie producer Mitchell Robbins, pictured here, chose the lofty apartment for its ideal location. “You feel the city’s energy, but with the terrace you also have a sense of the outdoors,” he says.





In the streamlined galley kitchen, the natural luster of wood is a perfect foil for shiny stainless appliances. The raised counter shields diners from preparations and cleanup.


tural elements, such as the massive support columns and beams dictated by the building's tower above, had to be successfully integrated in order to maintain the room's flow. The talented team met the challenge with an inspired layout that defies boundaries.

To achieve the desired degree of openness, solid doors—except for those leading to the hall and to the three baths—were banished in favor of room dividers reminiscent of shoji screens. Here, the traditional paper is replaced with milky, translucent glass. In the same vein,

cabinets sport grid-like doors. “The idea is Japanese,” Abe, who was born in Japan, explains. “You feel or anticipate something beyond, even though you can’t quite see it. The expectation of more expands the sense of space.”

A change of ceiling heights delineates zones, adds to the home's character and helps conceal mechanicals. In the kitchen and dining area, the apartment's center, the lowered ceiling lends intimacy while also hiding duct work. Step beyond and the ceiling rises to give stature to the living room, where friends congregate for conversation and drinks.

A soft, muted palette ties it all together, from sleek, galley-style kitchen to sophisticated master suite. And a bounty of luscious materials visually kicks it up a notch, though ever so subtly, like sunlight across water. True, a host of upscale stainless steel appliances inject more than a bit of eye-catching shine. And a granite top on the



Architect Peter Sollogub and interior designer Maho Abe created a free-flowing floor plan that incorporates potentially cumbersome structural elements without weighing down the space. Separating the kitchen and dining area from the living room, a massive, slate-covered column has become a convenient wine bar and display area. "Stone, wood, glass—they're natural materials which increase the home's Zen-like tone," Abe explains. A lowered floating ceiling renders the dining area a bit more snug. Dining table and chairs are by Dakota Jackson. An avid art collector, Robbins requested plenty of room to show off his finds. To allow the art to pop, walls are painted Ralph Lauren's "River Rock," a neutral shade that complements both the furnishings and the red birch floor.





In the master bedroom, a soffit defines the sleeping area. Beyond the shoji door lies a study. A pale leather headboard amps up the European-style bed.

L-shaped island doesn't go unnoticed. But it's the rich wood tones—particularly the mellow birch floor—that create the core of calm. The master bath is an artful blend of creamy maple woodwork, onyx and limestone. The skillful layering of textures brings life to the contemporary rooms without fuss. Against such a backdrop, window treatments need be only simply styled dressings to guard privacy. And fabrics remain natural: linen, silk, wool and cotton.

The designer abhors symmetry; since her client does, too, there's little of it. Where there's small, there's also big;

something large gets a short playmate and so forth. One wall flanking a bed may have a tall, skinny mirror, while on the bed's opposite side a lone night table will stand sentry. The result is a well-balanced, harmonious décor filled with yin and yang.

"Will it serve for a family in the future? I'm not sure—we'll have to see," the now happily married Robbins says of his tightly edited nest. "But this is exactly what I had imagined when we began—a kind of musical space defined by its architecture, and timeless." **NEH**



Elongated sconces—
art-like in their design—
enliven an onyx vanity
punctuated with white
porcelain sinks. Ample
storage hides behind
the maple grating. A
creamy limestone floor
is an additional luxury.