

# Columbus

MONTHLY

## A softer modern

These German Village homeowners wanted to create a softer version of the harsh modern décor in the home they purchased. Vintage chairs, globes and a centerpiece made of light bulbs add whimsy to the refurbished dining room.

by *Teresa Woodard*  
Photography by *Todd Yarrington*

The interior design of a German Village home is updated by using mahogany for countertops and incorporating precious collectibles.

In 2005, when Tim Straker and Mike Ebright purchased their most recent home in German Village, they knew the three-story brick Italianate had been restored years earlier after it was ravaged by fire. In the past two years, though, the two have shrewdly renovated the first and second floors in a contemporary update that is softer than the previous '90s décor.

Straker, a brand design executive, has redone nine homes and says he likes to create an eclectic mix of fine antiques with affordable finds. He, along with Ebright, a manager at a website design firm, plans an annual fall trek to the granddaddy of all flea markets—the Brimfield Antique and Flea Market Show in Massachusetts.

Their cost-conscious spending is most evident in the kitchen, typically the most expensive room to renovate. Here, Straker confidently matched a custom-created mahogany countertop with simple cabinetry. "Using less-expensive, painted poplar and simpler doors for the cabinetry allowed us to put more money elsewhere, like counters and appliances," says Straker. As an experienced renovator, he advises that homeowners often can keep cabinet costs down by eliminating costly interior add-ons such as pull-out

shelving and other such storage elements. Built by local cabinetmaker Mac Wood, Straker's cabinets feature refracted, lighthouse-style glass inserts salvaged from the former Rockwell plant at Port Columbus. Ironically, the local glass pieces were a flea market find from the Brimfield event.

Straker says he and Ebright chose to spend more of their budget on mahogany countertops, made with wood from Honduras, because counters are the "thing you touch the most in a kitchen." The mahogany also enhances the kitchen's nautical theme, as it is reminiscent of the wood used to build Straker's classic Century motorboat, which is docked at Buckeye Lake. Straker and Ebright then selected leather-covered chrome pulls, another tactile element, which perfectly matched the colors in

the countertop. Design elements were borrowed from La Bottega, a restaurant at New York's Maritime Hotel—the former home of the National Maritime Union. Like the restaurant, the room features glazed terra cotta wall tiles laid in a subway pattern.

Straker says he selected a mix of gourmet appliances, including a Thermador range, General Electric Monogram dishwasher and refrigerator, Dacor hood and Viking beverage cooler, all to boost the home's resale value. Two Elkay sinks, one rectangular and one square, were installed near the kitchen window and in the room's island.

The room is uniquely furnished with a rare mid-century recliner, a museum-quality investment that Straker calls the room's "hero piece." A side table situated nearby was \$20 at a yard sale. Bargain-priced bar stools, purchased from Grandview Mercantile, line up near the kitchen island, which is topped with honed white Carrera marble.

A coordinating marble table from Anthropologie is paired with industrial chairs from a gold leaf factory in Connecticut. The chairs' height is adjustable, so they can be used at the table or bar. Straker says the chairs still bear bits of gold due to their history and are "50 percent less than new chairs with 100 percent more character." For the table's banquette, the backs are covered in textured faux leather purchased for \$9 a yard at a remnant store and coupled with more durable and expensive leather upholstery for the seats.

The room is accessorized with a Hull Pottery collection, displayed in custom cabinets purposefully painted white to show off the colorful pottery that Straker's grandfather, who was Hull's chief engineer, helped design. "Using collections adds color and texture to a room," says Straker. "When used in

masses, collections are better than wallpaper." The room's bargain accessories include vintage signs that hang behind the banquette and mix-and-match pottery filled with succulents. An oversized, industrial light fixture above the island was salvaged from a 1940s factory. The only cost was the rewiring.

In the dining room, Straker replaced the walls' faux finish with multiple coats of a dark brown Ralph Lauren paint. He also invested in a seven-inch crown molding

and splurged on two wall sconces from Gump's, a luxury home décor store in San Francisco. Two other investment pieces are a chandelier and an English wet bar that resembles the bow of an antique motorboat and anchors the room's corner. He retrofitted the room's canned lighting with new inserts to inexpensively,

but impactfully, highlight the artwork.

The room's fireplace was too close to the dining room table to hold traditional gas logs, so Straker cleverly filled the

space with a carload of vintage globes from a trip to Brimfield. Ebright proposed moving their light bulb collection from a wall display to the table's center.

"Mike contributes these design zingers," says Straker, who's not a fan of floral centerpieces. "I'd rather invest in a bowl of fresh fruit, light bulbs, a giant hurricane filled with a candle and birdseed or something that is unexpected, for the centerpiece," he says.

For the living room, the two chose timeless mahogany veneers to cover the space's curved wall. The aim was to make the drywall look less starkly modern and more structural. On a side table, Straker grouped orange pottery that was originally situated throughout the house and arranged the hand-me-down pieces beside a long-coveted faux wooden lamp. Framed postcards depicting a former Buckeye Lake amusement park grace the adjacent wall.

The first level's light maple floors were refurbished in a dark walnut finish to tone down the home's modern feel and help ground the rooms' high ceilings. Straker refinished the home's stainless steel stair railing by using three different spray paints to create a hand-oiled bronze effect. He says replacing the custom railing would have cost thousands, so he didn't mind taking a risk with the paints.

A first floor powder room recently was updated with a mahogany counter and premium tile. A sink and faucet, two big-box store purchases, gain a custom look when joined with the more expensive counter and tile. The opposite wall is playfully covered with paint-by-number art purchased on eBay.

The master suite consumes much of the space on the second level, with its large bath and a walk-

in closet. Another bedroom, a guest bath and laundry facilities are also located here. The floors are covered in wall-to-wall seagrass, which Straker says is more durable but more expensive than carpeting. He claims it improves with age and adds to the home's resale value. A third-floor loft, still under construction, will feature a large sitting area, office space and another guest room and bath. ■

*Teresa Woodard is a freelance writer.*

## Money-Wise Design Tips

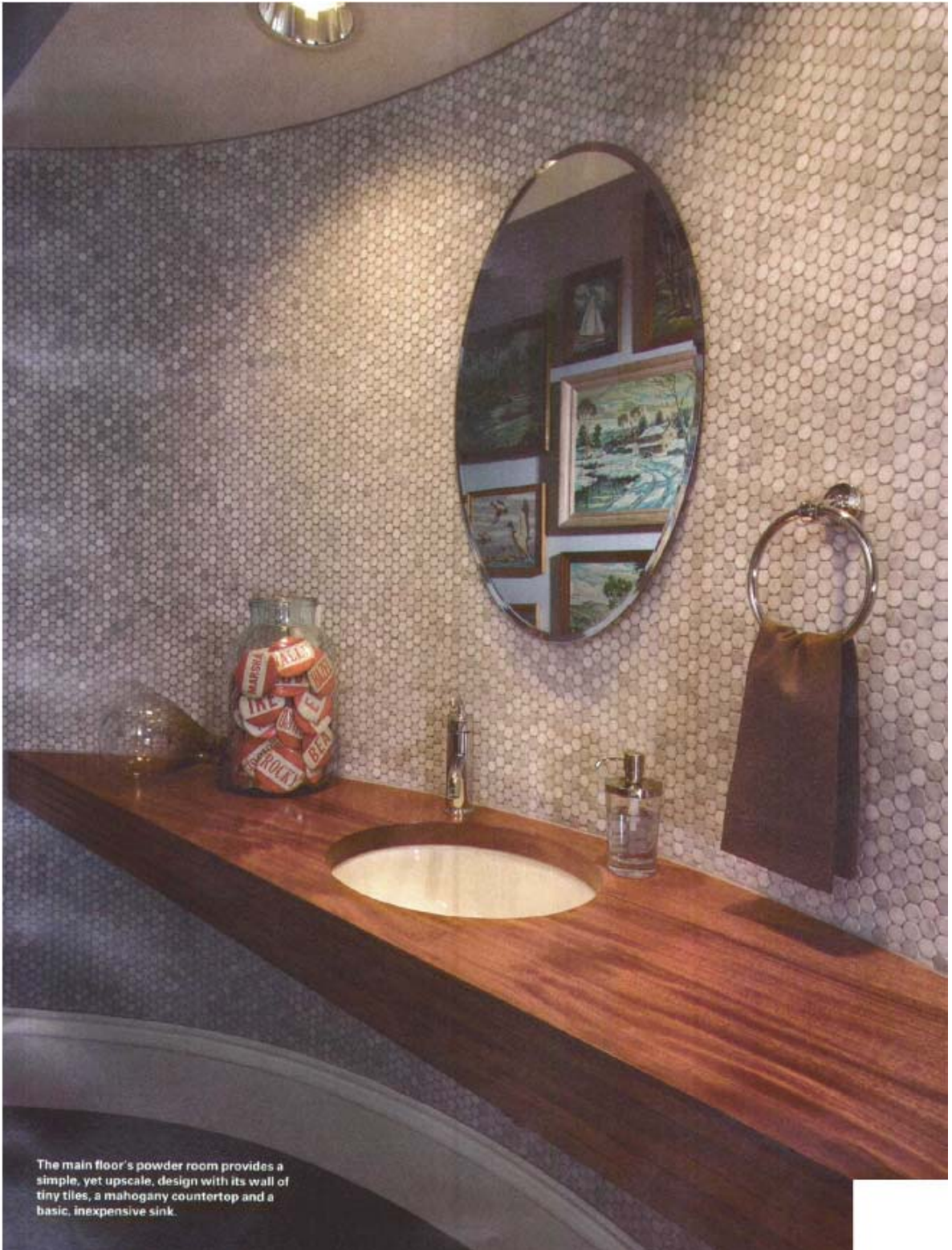
**Design connoisseur Tim Straker offers the following advice to keep you in your budget:**

- **Be patient to avoid costly mistakes.** "Living through a renovation is not pleasant, but the extra two weeks or two months it takes will seem like nothing later," says Straker.
- **Save dollars by renovating within the footprint of a room.** Significant costs are saved when the room's mechanicals (plumbing and electric) are left in place.
- **Make use of what you have.** Even the tackiest pieces have a place when set in the right context. Straker points to his dining room's boat bar as an example.
- **Don't be afraid to make a commitment.** "When I help friends, they're often afraid to make a purchase, thinking they'll have to keep it for life," says Straker. Instead, he suggests buying what you love and living with it for as long as you like.
- **Trust your first instincts for a bolder payoff.** Straker says he learned this lesson as a new homeowner when one weekend he spontaneously used white paint to refinish the traditional furnishings of an Upper Arlington ranch then accessorized his home with colorful retro items.

*Their cost-conscious spending is most evident in the kitchen, typically the most expensive room to renovate.*



**Homeowners Tim Straker and Mike Ebright elected to cut costs on cabinetry while installing mahogany and marble countertops in the renovated kitchen of their brick Italianate house.**



The main floor's powder room provides a simple, yet upscale, design with its wall of tiny tiles, a mahogany countertop and a basic, inexpensive sink.



Elements for the kitchen décor were borrowed from La Bottega, a restaurant in New York's Maritime Hotel. The room features glazed, terra cotta wall tiles laid in a subway pattern.



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**Much of the second floor is dedicated to the master suite, a second bedroom, a guest bath and a laundry room.**