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# east moves east of the cascades

text by ann colford

photos by deb cutler

Nine years ago, when a Spokane couple had the opportunity to create a custom-built home for themselves southeast of the city, they incorporated aspects of Japanese design into an updated version of the Craftsman style so popular in the Northwest. The resulting home reflects this region's connection with the entire Pacific Rim, from traditional Northwest Coast Indian artwork to the antiquities of Japan.

After attending a home show and studying lots of home design magazines, the couple settled on a floor plan based on a design by a Seattle architect. Then came the time to choose a concept for the inte-

The family room incorporates elements of Northwest Coast Indian artwork into the Japanese-style home.

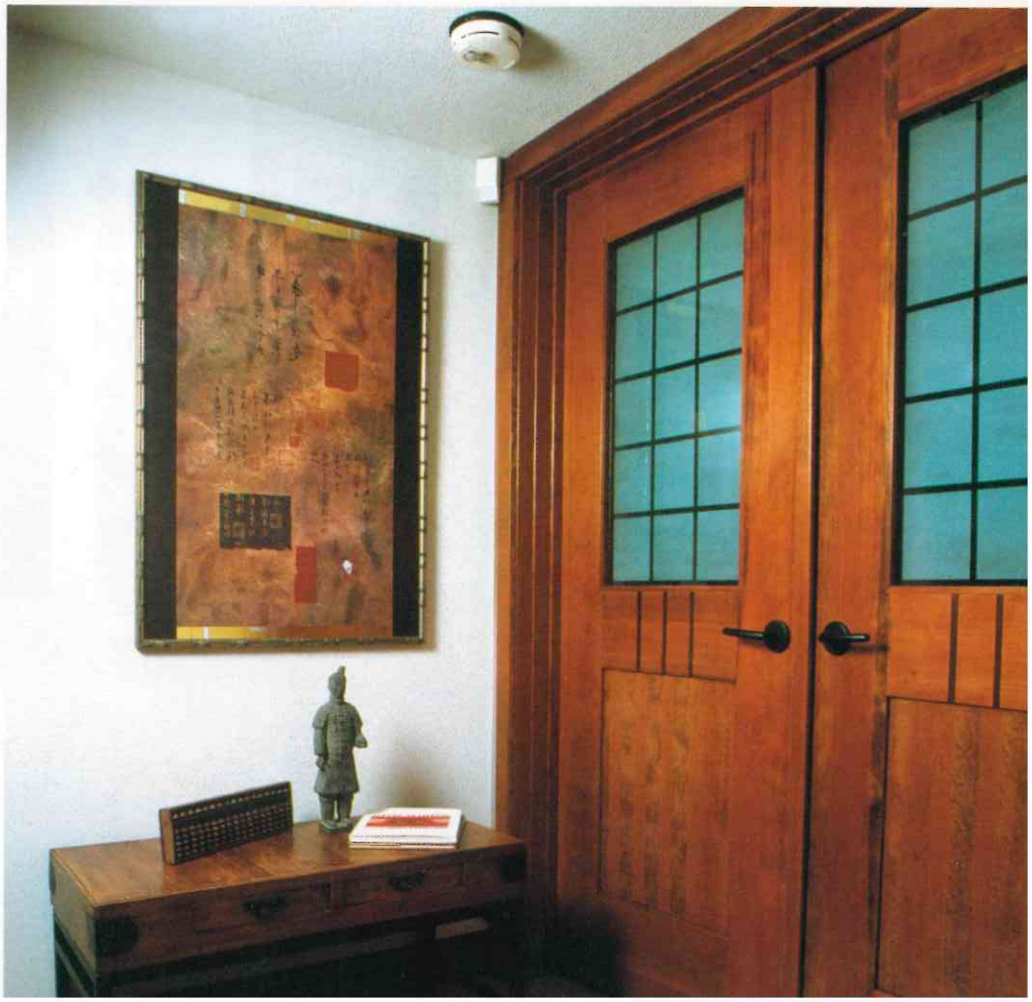


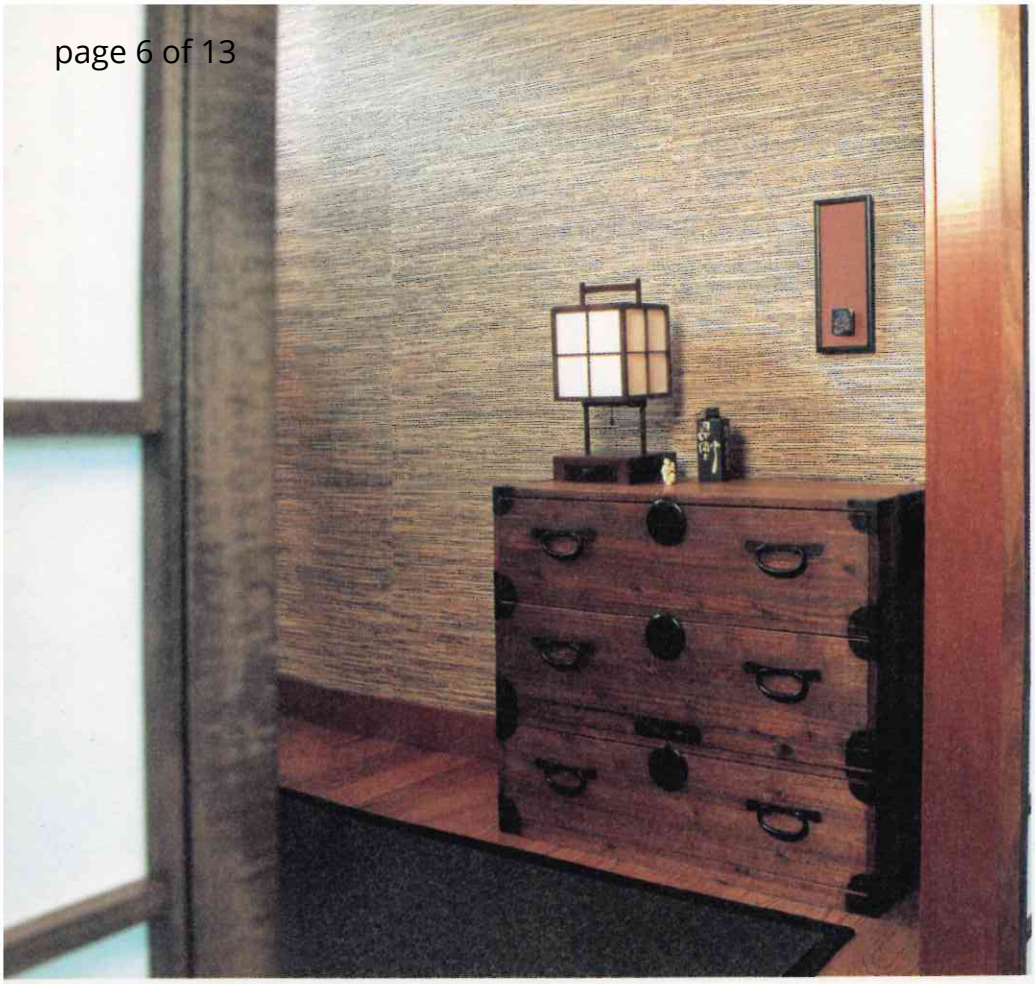
TOP: The living room decorated in muted tones of bronze, gray and cinnamon overlooks the Dishman Hills. BOTTOM: Following Japanese design tradition, each area has a focal point. Here, at the entrance to the workout room, an antique wood bench, abacus, a clay Chinese figure and wall art enhance a corner. LEFT: In the powder room, a custom-made sink pedestal is designed to reflect geometric lines used throughout the house.

rior design. The wife, who is an interior designer, says the idea of using Asian influences actually came fairly easily because it was the one style preference they had in common. "We both agreed on it," she says with a laugh. "We both like it." Both husband and wife had early exposure to Japanese design, she explains. "My father was in Okinawa during World War II, and we had Asian things in the house when I was growing up. And my husband's father grew up in Hawaii and lived there until right before Pearl Harbor."

The couple was drawn to Japanese design by more than familiarity, however. "We like the tranquility of it," she explains. "We both work with the public, and when we come home we're looking for serenity. This house is very quiet and peaceful."

Part of the tranquility comes from the house's semi-rural setting on a hillside lot surrounded by ponderosa pines and other natural local vegetation. But like the Frank Lloyd Wright designs of the original Arts and Crafts era, the house design and landscaping blend well with the nat-





ural environment. A series of terraced walkways and garden spaces lead from the street down to the front entry, marking a gradual transition from public space to private. While one path leads to the front door, another winds around the side of the house to the back, where it connects with multi-level decks and more natural plantings. The decks illustrate the Japanese principle of intermediate spaces — those that are neither completely interior nor exterior. "We live on a hillside, so we have to transition ourselves down the hill," says the wife. "When we sit out there, we seem to be floating in the trees." The wife's sister, a local landscape architect, did the landscape design.

Beyond the family connections, much of the work in the house was done by local and regional craftspeople. The wife designed the home's details herself and drew up the interior elevations, working in partnership with several local craftsmen who made the designs a reality. The husband built most of the decks himself, developing skills that his wife says he didn't know he had.

In traditional Japanese home design, one transitions gradually from the exterior

TOP: A small tansu, used as a sideboard, sits inside the dining room. The Japanese use tansus to store everything from dishes to bedding to shoes. BOTTOM: The master bedroom overlooks a lower garden and the Dishman Hills.





At nighttime, sleeping pillows are exchanged for decorative pillows in pullout drawers beneath the platform bed.



Custom cherry cabinets, stained a rich cinnamon brown with three vertical bars finished in deeper tones, accentuate the kitchen's clean lines.

world to the heart of the home, moving from garden to veranda to the interior living space. Shoji screens—thin wood frames lined with rice paper—divide the living spaces within the home and often function as exterior walls, admitting light and ventilation while maintaining privacy. Clean, spare lines with lots of natural materials like wood, grass, reeds and paper dominate the Japanese interior. The emphasis is on simplicity and harmony with nature.

Unlike a traditional Japanese home, with its communal, multi-function spaces, the Spokane house incorporates Asian design features and accents within the typically western layout of a living room, dining room, kitchen, TV room, and master bedroom suite on the main floor. The house's floor plan situates the main living spaces all on one level, with a lower level dedicated to guest quarters, a home office, and an exercise room.

One highlight of the large open kitchen is the custom cherry cabinetry, stained a rich cinnamon brown. Three vertical bars —pickled and finished in a subtly darker

tone to decorate each door, echoing the latticework of traditional shoji screens. This theme continues in the rest of the interior doors, which each have three contrasting vertical bars inlaid within the natural fir. The woodwork in the TV room beside the kitchen continues the Japanese theme, with a fireplace surround that resembles a shoji screen. But instead of Asian art on the walls, the homeowners have chosen a series of prints and sculptures from Northwest Coast tribes, extending the Pacific Rim theme.

The kitchen, living room and master bedroom all take advantage of the marvelous panorama of the nearby Dishman Hills. In the living room, the homeowner-designer has gathered custom-designed seating into one corner near the windows. She chose the fabric, mostly in shades of rust and black, and selected the design she wanted, then worked with local furniture makers, Freeze Furniture, to complete the finished product. Adding more Asian flavor are a Korean chest at the room's entrance and shoji screens in front of the windows. The screens slide open all the way to accommodate the view or can be closed for a more intimate atmosphere.

The shojis, fabricated by a craftsman on Bainbridge Island, serve to separate space as well as add detail. In the main hallway, a floor-to-ceiling shoji screen draws back to reveal an intimate dining room. The couple often entertain, and the shojis can add an air of mystery to an ordinary dinner party. The wife says, "Sometimes I'll have the table all decorated, and the guests can't see it until I open up the doors."

Another small chest, or tansu, stands just inside the entrance to the dining room. In this space, the tansu functions as a sideboard, but the Japanese use tansus to store everything from dishes to bedding to shoes. A reproduction Japanese rice paper lantern, found at Gumps in San Francisco, sits on the tansu. Recessed lighting in the ceiling is covered by antique window shojis that the wife repapered with a fiberglass-impregnated paper called Synskin. The wallcovering is black-backed grasscloth, with a texture reminiscent of Japanese tatami mats or hemp shades.

"We had grasscloth where we lived before, and at first I didn't want it here because of the visible seams," she says. "I looked and looked at wallpapers, and I finally came to accept the seams and realize I needed this texture in here. And it does help to absorb sound. So sometimes

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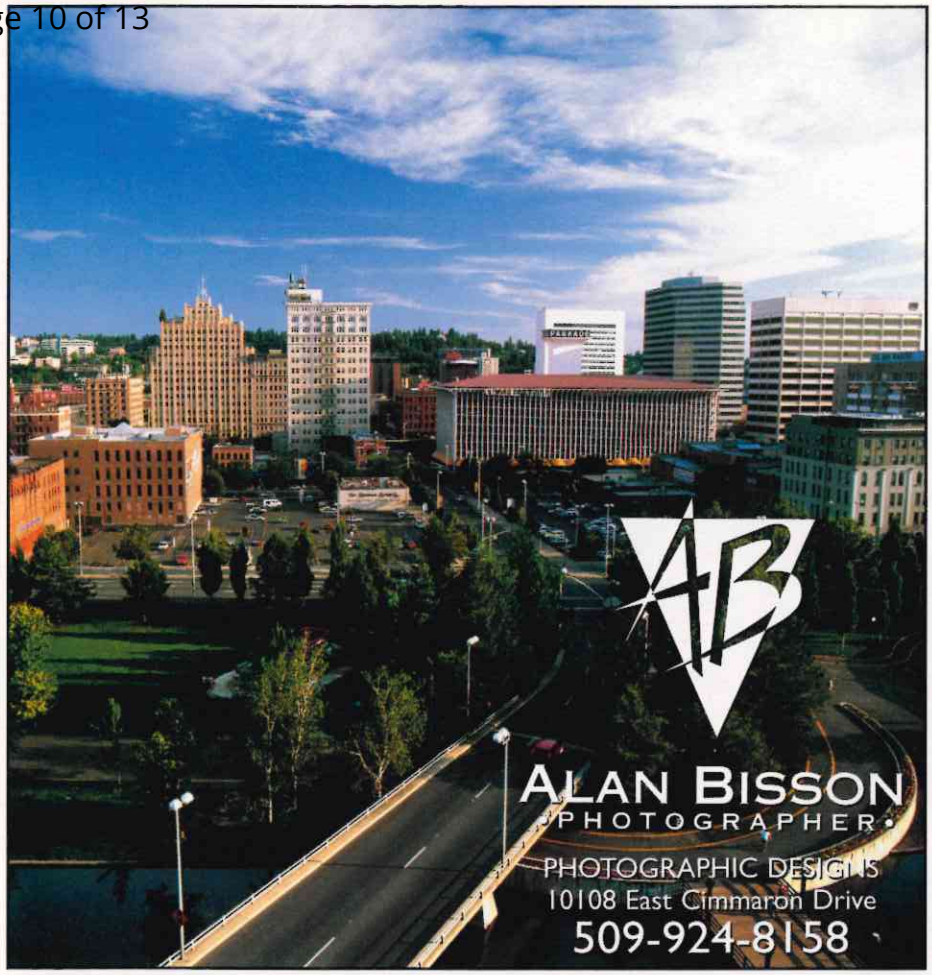


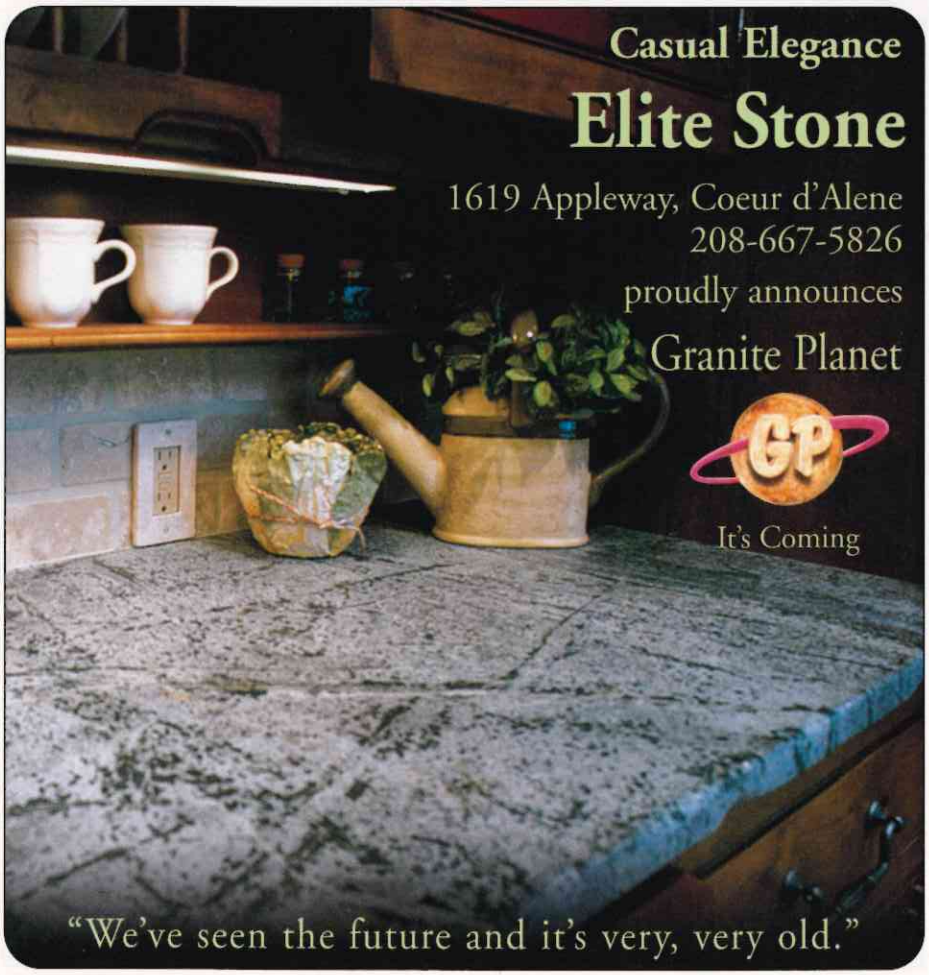


you have to go a roundabout way to get back to what you really need."

In the wall between the dining room and entry hall, the homeowners installed two antique Japanese transom screens. "These date from the 1800s," the wife says. "They would go over doorways to allow light and air to enter the house. In each home, each doorway would have a screen with a similar format, but the carvings within may vary from door to door." Like so many features of Japanese design, the screens achieved a practical purpose—lighting and ventilation— without sacrificing aesthetics. Thanks to another regional resource, such rarities can be found on this side of the Pacific. "These came from a wonderful source in Seattle called Honeychurch Antiques," she explains. "And Honeychurch is also in Hong Kong. The parents are in Hong Kong and the son is in Seattle."

Although the fabulous view attracts attention in the master bedroom, the customized bed is surely the centerpiece of the room. Once again, the wife sketched out what she wanted and worked with a craftsman to bring the design to life. "I drew it up and then my woodworker built it for me," she says. Unfortunately, the two local woodworkers who created all the custom cabinetry and finish work have both retired from the business, but the homeowners plan to call them for referrals should they need more work done.

Instead of a footboard, a separate blanket chest sits at the end of the bed. Beneath the bed's platform are several storage drawers, including one where sleeping pillows are stored. Each night, the couple swaps the decorative pillows on the bed for plain down pillows to sleep on. "You don't want to be taking your decorative fabric off and on all the time because it wears out the fabric from the oils on your fingers," says the wife. All of the custom fabric work was also done locally in Spokane, by Carolyn Bishop of Window World. "I've worked with Carolyn for almost 20 years now," she says. "She's very good."

Japanese art and design may be best known for its minimalism, and throughout the house the homeowners have followed the Japanese tradition of having one aesthetic focal point in each space, such as a single dramatic floral arrangement. Despite this preference for sparseness, extremes in style are also part of the Japanese aesthetic. Perhaps the most ornate example of this principle in the home is the kimono that graces the land-

# elements of traditional japanese design

Rooms serve multiple purposes and functions; one room is often used for eating, visiting, studying, and sleeping.

"Soft" boundaries: Property lines are designated by gardens and plantings rather than by walls or open space; exterior walls of the house are often movable or removable, creating a sense of oneness with surrounding nature and transitional zones from the exterior to the more private interior space.

Translucent screens, shades, or curtains are often employed to create a sense of privacy from the street or neighboring homes while still allowing plenty of light and ventilation to enter the interior. The same techniques are used to separate space within the home as well.

Rectilinear forms and lines are most common, especially in the structural elements of the house, and they are often aligned in an asymmetrical pattern. Curves and round shapes are used in accents only, as in a single striking floral arrangement, a round rice paper lantern, or the brushstrokes of a work of calligraphy.

Furnishings are spare, emphasizing a clean and clutter-free aesthetic. Bedding, cushions for seating, and low tables are often stored away in closets when not in use.

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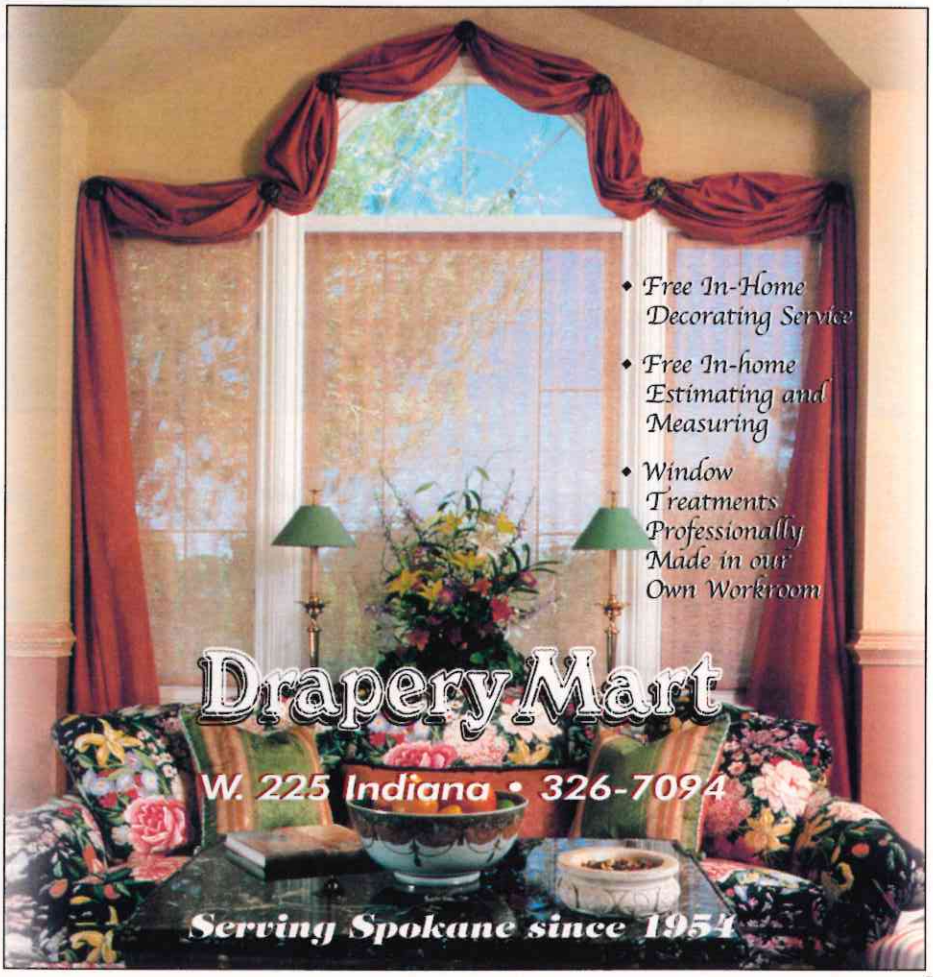

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Dating from the 1880s, a Japanese transom screen allows light and air to enter the dining room.

ing of the staircase leading to the lower level. "We wanted something very dramatic in this spot," the wife says. "And the imagery on the kimono has significance—the crane, the bonsai, the chrysanthemums, the carriage. It's all very symbolic."

Many of the decorative accents in the house have been purchased during the homeowners' travels. "My husband does a lot of traveling all over the world, so we're always looking for pieces that will work in the house," the wife says. "That prevents us from purchasing souvenirs that won't work." To make sure that a new piece will blend with the color themes, she carries a bag of fabric swatches wherever she goes, calling it her "house in a bag."

After living in the home for nine years, the homeowners say they are satisfied with the house, both as a design project and as a home. "As a designer, I want my clients' home to reflect who they are," says the wife. "Because I'm in the business, I'm aware of everything that's available, all the temptations, but there's little I'd change. This house is a real reflection of us. This is my favorite home." h&l


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