





a tale of two spaces

WITH TODAY'S CONDOS,
A DISTINCTIVE NEW
LIFESTYLE HAS ARRIVED

Sunset streaks the western sky with gold and pink, the colors reflected in the fast-flowing Piscataqua River. At the same time, lights along the waterfront come on, creating a glittering display against the deepening dusk.

On Badger's Island in Kittery, Maine, Betty and Jim LaBranche watch the setting sun from their condo, while on the Portsmouth, New Hampshire side of the river, Renée and Dan Plummer share a similar view from their elegant brick space in Harbour Place. Both couples traded traditional homes for condo living, and both would never go back.

The Plummer Home

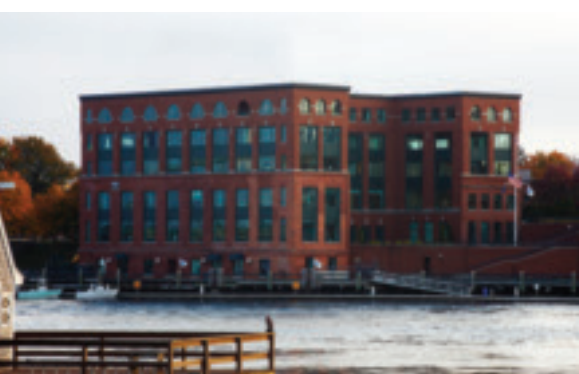
When Renée Plummer closed the door of her 250-year-old Stratham farmhouse, she never looked back. "I thought I would miss having the larger place and all the land," she recalled. "But I haven't, not one bit, and Dan, who's always been an outdoor guy, hasn't even missed working outside." The Plummers, who own the Harbour Place building in Portsmouth, were eager to live in the city, with easy access to shopping, restaurants and events, and the move didn't disappoint. "There's always so much to do; we haven't had time to feel a moment of regret," said Dan. "I'm never bored."

The striking chandelier over Renée's dining room table was handcrafted in Venice to resemble a bouquet of flowers. Off to one side, the game table provides a perfect location for an afternoon chess match and easily sets up as a cozy dining area for two to four guests

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Above: Stunning arched windows give the living room dramatic views from every angle. Renée primarily used a neutral palette, but brought in the colors of the earth, sea and sky with key accent pieces. | Right: The kitchen has a Tuscan feel, with its graceful stone arch behind the stove and grape accents. Note the unique island with its raised top of smoked glass. | Below: an exterior view of Harbour Place and the swift-flowing Piscataqua river. Facing page, above: The entry hallway does double-duty as a gallery, featuring paintings the Plummers have collected over the years. Below: Off to one side of the hallway, Dan's office is both a relaxing haven and a workspace. The handsome desk is handcrafted of Cuban mahogany and features inlays of ebony.





The Plummers' unit has striking waterfront views from every room. Dramatic arched windows, carved from the brick facade, command attention in the living and dining areas. Because of the many large windows, and the fact that their unit is on the top floor and fifth story of the building, the rooms seem to float in the air. Everywhere there is the sweep of sky and water, with the steel arches of the Memorial Bridge rising up like sculpture.

The Plummers worked closely with architect Dann Norris Batting of Chester, New Hampshire, in designing their condo. Dann said his biggest challenge was working within the existing structure and dividing up the space, but his experience with other condo projects served him well. Upon entering the condo, guests are immediately transported to a space both beautiful and distinctive.

The Plummers' kitchen, dining room and living room flow together. Renée selected a palette of white, ivory and cream for the walls and major pieces, but brought the colors of earth, sea and sky into the living room area with blue-and-white-striped dining room chairs, a taupe sofa and upholstered side chairs in blue and yellow. The glass coffee table immediately intrigues, as it turns out to be not just one piece, but four glass cubes working together. Renée kept the accents simple—a few nautical elements, such as a ship's model which echoes the working harbor outside, a striking mirror framed in blue glass, photographs and, above the dining room table, a lovely crystal chandelier. Brought from Venice, it is crafted to resemble a glass bouquet of flowers.

The Plummers love to entertain, but also enjoy more intimate suppers, so Renée placed a game table, which can easily seat two or four, by the windows for use on cozier occasions. The kitchen has a Tuscan feel, with a graceful tiled arch behind the stove, images of grape leaves set into the tiles and a handcrafted metal chandelier over the island. The tile work is soft taupe, which contrasts nicely with the bold black granite countertops and white cabinetry.

The most striking element in the kitchen is the island, which has a raised top of smoked glass, and was designed by Dann. Ivory high-backed chairs with tan seats line one side, making this a popular gathering spot. The kitchen is also a masterpiece of built-ins, with every conceivable nook designed to accommodate Renée's cookbooks, spices, utensils and pots and pans. "It's like a ship," she laughed. "Everything has its space and all the items I need are right at hand."

Just off the kitchen, a set of etched glass pocket doors open into Dan's office. Bookshelves line the paneled walls and a fireplace makes the room instantly welcoming. The desk, facing yet another amazing view, is one of a kind. Handcrafted by Tom McLaughlin of Canterbury, New Hampshire, it features sweeping lines of Cuban mahogany and is inlaid with ebony. About the room are mementos of the couple's travels—a model of a Blue Angels fighter jet and, over the mantle, a painting of an Italian harbor.





The condo has several guest rooms and baths, but by far the most distinctive space is the master bedroom and bath. Double doors lead into a room that is a vision of pale gold and cream. The coffered ceiling, fabricated by David Drapeau of Drayco Builders in North Hampton, New Hampshire, features a dramatic circular relief, which Renée had fitted with a chandelier. Crystal sconces flank the fireplace, while tall lamps of amber glass provide soft lighting elsewhere. Deep tan upholstered chairs sit cozily by the window, inviting one to linger and enjoy the view. The bedroom also has its own private balcony, perfect for that late day glass of wine or early morning coffee.

In the master bath, which Renée designed in neutral tones, Dann positioned a small pass-through window so one could enjoy the view from the soaking tub. The bath also features his-and-her sinks and a walk-in shower, as well as Renée’s favorite part—a recessed vanity set into a graceful alcove and matched by a lovely curved mirror that follows the archway.

Although everything is on one floor, no amenity was overlooked. The kitchen opens onto a small sheltered deck, where the couple likes to grill year-round, and one guest room also enjoys a balcony. The laundry room contains space for ironing, storage, a second freezer and a sink and pantry. Even the hallway does double-duty as a gallery. Dann’s genius came into full play here, as he created the feel of an Italian palazzo. The inlaid marble floor features a stunning diamond pattern in shades of ivory and gray, while the cool, off-white walls showcase paintings the Plummers have collected over the years.

“We were in our house 28 years,” said Renée. “I thought I’d feel some pangs about leaving, but I truly have no regrets. This is home now, and we love it.”

The LaBranche Home

Betty LaBranche, a well-known Seacoast realtor, maintains a home office in her condo, but joked in a recent conversation that “I can never get anything done here. The view of the river is mesmerizing,” she said. “You constantly see something different—from the boat traffic to the birds, to just the way the light plays on the water.”

Betty and Jim moved from a home nestled on ten acres in Brentwood, New Hampshire to their waterfront condo a few years ago. The couple acknowledges that it was a tough decision, but one they don’t regret. “We love being within walking distance to Portsmouth, and we have a great camaraderie with our neighbors,” said Betty. “There is a vibrancy living in this area.”

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Above left: Architect Dann Norris Batting positioned a pass-through window above the soaking tub so the Plummers could enjoy the river views. | Above right: These unique doorknobs once graced doors at the historic Commodore Hotel in New York (since razed).

Facing page: The kitchen embodies Betty LaBranche’s signature palette of black and white with vivid accents of red. Note the huge cherry wood island with its nine-and-one-half-foot seamless granite top.







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INTERIOR DESIGNER (*bedroom*)

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STONE SUPPLIER/ARTISAN

W.S. Goodrich Inc., 603 679-5338, wsgoodrich.com

Facing page, clockwise: The dining room and living room share the same cream and white color scheme, but tall white columns accent the dining area. Spectacular views of the ever-changing river are present everywhere. | The kitchen merges comfortably with the family room, which features a dramatic black wall, contrasting white marble fireplace and cozy furniture. This welcoming space is where everyone congregates when Betty and Jim's children and grandchildren are in town. | An exterior view of the condo complex after a recent snowfall. | Above: A bold wine-colored wall and eye-catching zebra print chair add punch to the gallery featuring paintings from the LaBranche's travels.

From their condo they enjoy glorious water views in every room, as all of the outer walls are glass. Betty and Jim worked closely with builder Eric Chinburg to plan the layout. She credits him with being "very accommodating" in creating the floor plan, which has the kitchen, dining room and living room flowing together. "This design is wonderful for entertaining, as people can move and mingle throughout the house," she explained.

The kitchen area embodies Betty's signature color palette of black and white with vivid accents of red. The built-in cabinets, which cover one wall, are painted cream. Even the refrigerator has custom wooden cream panels so as not to break up the visual flow, and the stove hood was also custom-made in cream. The cream molding extends to the ceiling, expanding the room's lines.

In contrast, the huge island is made of cherry wood, with massive carved legs on the front, and a top of polished black granite. The top is eye-catching, as it is nine-and-one-half-feet long with no seams. "It was so large that W.S. Goodrich Inc. of Epping, New Hampshire, the supplier, had to remove the deck railings and use a crane to lift it into the kitchen," said Betty.

The black granite of the kitchen island is picked up again in the countertops, which wrap around the back kitchen wall, providing a convenient workspace by the stove and built-in microwave. In order to keep from being too monochromatic, Betty has added splashes of her favorite color—bright red. Scarlet-enameled cookware graces the stove, and the hardwood floors are punctuated with vivid Oriental rugs.

The working area of Betty's kitchen merges effortlessly with the family room, just steps away. In fact, she considers it part of the kitchen. The family room features a white marble fireplace set against a dramatic black wall—the only black wall in the room, as the others are cream, continuing the kitchen's color scheme. The black highlights the fireplace and, above it, a large painting of the Portsmouth waterfront. Large comfy red leather sofas in the Chesterfield style flank two sides of the room, while a wingback chair and matching ottoman in subtle, red-printed fabric and a beige slipper chair provide additional seating. End tables by each sofa are set with matching red-and-black lacquered lamps in an Asian style. A huge coffee table occupies the center of the room, while an entertainment center fills one corner, and a bookcase lines the remaining wall. Scattered about the room are photos, paintings and other souvenirs of family and travels. The effect is immediately welcoming and cozy.

"Everything here is oriented toward family. This is where everyone congregates," said Betty. "People pull cushions up to the coffee table to have snacks, watch the game, play cards. I went with the leather Chesterfield sofas because they wear well—which is important if you have grandchildren. The entire family comes home often, so I frequently have eleven to thirteen people here, and this setup works very well."



The master bath is a study in gold, with its burnished walls and golden tiles. The massive burled walnut sideboard was custom-fitted with sinks. Reflected in the mirror is a statue of the Venus de Milo, which graces the edge of the hot tub. Next page: The master bedroom continues the gold theme, and features a beautiful bedspread and draperies designed by Betty and Jim's daughter, Nicole Yee. | Flowers provided by Flowersbythesea.net



The dining room is set off from the other spaces by tall white columns. Cream curtains flank the glass doors leading to a section of the deck, and a fourteen-foot Karastan rug in rich reds and blues graces the floor. The long dark table—accompanied by white chairs with black cushions—has a glass top which picks up the glitter of the glass walls and the chandelier above. The chandelier was custom-made in Venice, Italy, and hand-carried home by the LaBranches.

Betty let the cream-and-white color scheme flow into the living room, relying on the spectacular views to add color. The walls are white, and the fireplace has a white mantle, but mirrored black tile on the surround and a black hearth make a bold statement. Overstuffed chairs and the sofa are rich cream with dark walnut trim, while other pieces, such as vivid red side chairs and a red footstool, add punches of color. “I deliberately kept the furniture low-backed so it wouldn’t block the views,” noted Betty.

A unique glass coffee table with a wrought iron base seems to float above the floor, letting through views of a lovely rug in hues of blue, cream and ochre. The room is full of many striking elements, including a large antique lantern, which sits near a porthole window, and a dramatic rectangular mirror above the mantle.

The master bedroom is a study in gold, with walls the honey color of Tuscan fields. A rich, gold brocade spread, designed by Betty’s daughter, interior designer Nicole Yee, graces the bed, while matching drapes frame the windows.

Elegant twin bureaus with carved fronts double as nightstands on each side of the bed, and a fireplace (with a hidden television above) makes the room cozy. The bedroom also looks out onto the river and its ever-changing moods. The master bath continues the golden theme, with burnished walls and golden tiles on the floor, Jacuzzi and walk-in European-style shower. A massive burl walnut sideboard custom-fitted with sinks and coordinating antique mirror lines one wall, while a replica of the *Venus de Milo* statue graces the edge of the Jacuzzi.

Just off the bedroom is the LaBranches’ combination foyer/gallery area, where walls of deep wine highlight paintings from their travels to Europe, Greece and Bali. A parlor chair in a dramatic zebra print recalls the black-and-white theme of the adjoining rooms.

With their children grown, and grandchildren in the family picture now, the LaBranches feel a waterfront condo was the right move. “We are all about having family and friends over,” said Betty. “This space allows us plenty of room for everyone to get together. We have a wrap-around deck so we can relax outside and barbecue, but we don’t have the hassle of yard work.” Added Jim, “Since we aren’t tied down to home maintenance, it’s easy to just lock the door and get away. We love to travel, and that option is easier for us now. Although I have to say, the river is so fascinating, I almost hate to leave.” ■