

YOUR HOME: HOW THE PROS LIVE

THE
BOSTON

Globe

02.24.08

MAGAZINE

+ REAL ESTATE

Explaining Our
Insatiable Desire for
Bigger, Bolder, More
Luxurious Homes

BY DANIEL MCGINN

HOW 2 ARCHITECTS SALVAGED A WRECK

AU BON PAIN'S
HEAD CHEF DISHES
ON HIS KITCHEN

A FASHION DESIGNER'S
SHOE CLOSET

EXPERTS' PICKS
FOR WALLPAPERS,
TILES, AND PAINTS



Architects Anne Barrett
and Todd Dundon in their
Jamaica Plain town house

ALSO INSIDE

Does Your Date Pass
the Movie Test?

Grow Up, Bill Belichick!

Herb Chambers
Gets Smart



LIVING ROOM
BEFORE

UPSTAIRS, DOWNSTAIRS

A whole-house gut-renovation involving four floors, a three-hour time difference, two sisters – and one very special ritual.

BY KRIS FRIESWICK



GET THE LOOK

Todd Dundon bought his mid-century-modern daybed (it's also pictured on the cover) in Los Angeles. Today, Anne Barrett sends clients to Reside in Cambridge for vintage pieces from that era. You can also find a similar reproduction piece at Urban Outfitters.



LOW

New daybed, \$480 at Urban Outfitters, 361 Newbury Street, Boston, 617-236-0088, and other locations, urbanoutfitters.com

HIGH

Vintage teak-and-rattan daybed, \$1,800 at Reside, 266 Concord Avenue, Cambridge, 617-547-2929, resideinc.com



UPSTAIRS

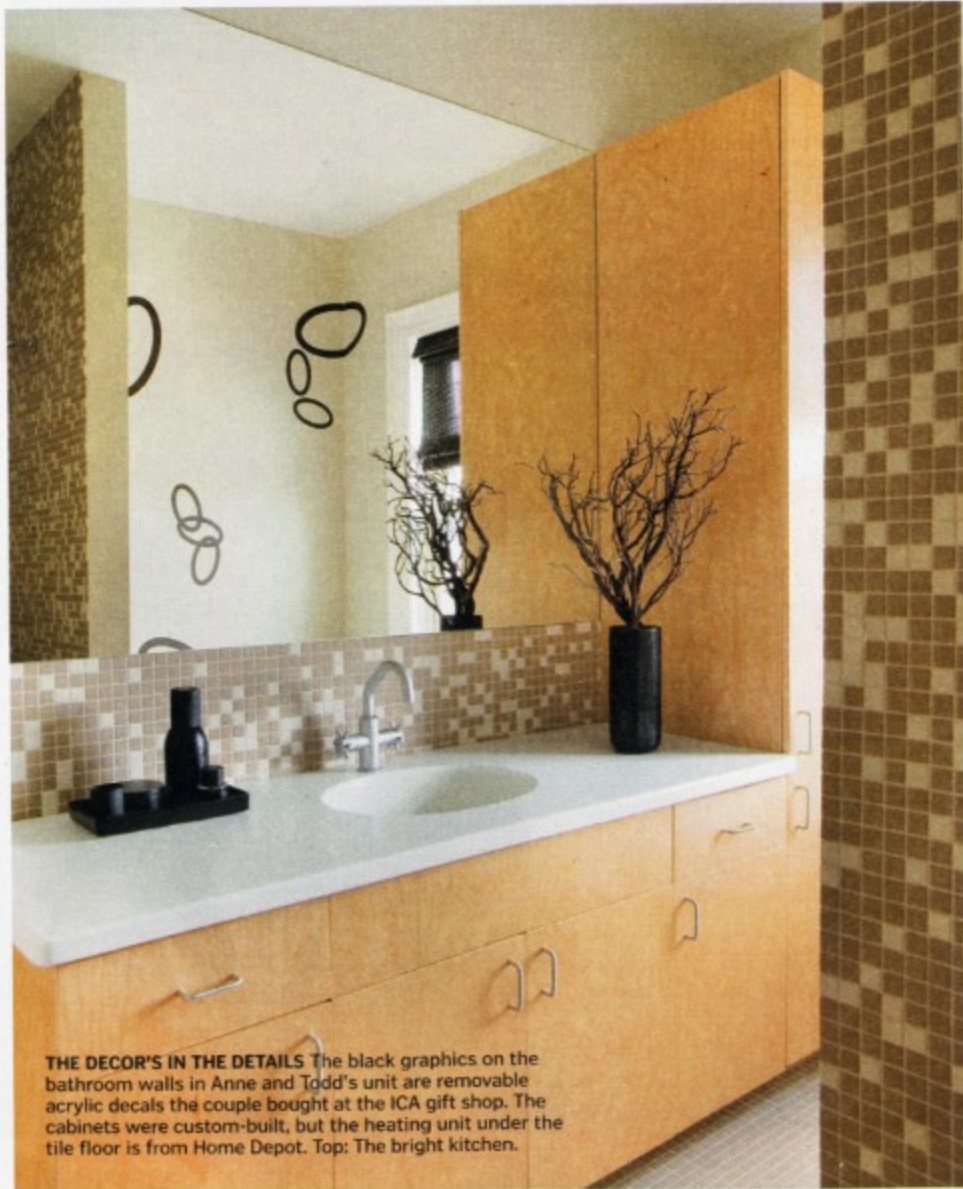
LIVING LARGE Architects Anne Barrett and Todd Dundon mix new kitchen cabinets from IKEA with a vintage mid-century couch with their circa 1895 original fireplace. Art, too, has a prominent place: There are paintings by Anne's sister, Hannah Barrett (seen in mirror), and Laurel Sparks, Hannah's girlfriend, on the walls. Laurel's work is currently on view at the MFA.



KITCHEN BEFORE



BATHROOM BEFORE



THE DECOR'S IN THE DETAILS The black graphics on the bathroom walls in Anne and Todd's unit are removable acrylic decals the couple bought at the ICA gift shop. The cabinets were custom-built, but the heating unit under the tile floor is from Home Depot. Top: The bright kitchen.



UPSTAIRS

AWAY FROM IT ALL On the top floor, a framed flea-market find hangs above the bed. The wood floors are original, but the windows are new, efficient models.



GET THE LOOK

Anne and Todd bought their licensed reproduction of the Le Corbusier sling chair at Design Within Reach. But there are also plenty of nonlicensed reproductions available.

HIGH

Sling chair in cowhide, \$1,680 at Design Within Reach Studio, 519 Tremont Street, Boston, 617-451-7801, and 1C30 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, 617-576-3690, dwr.com



LOW

Sling chair in cowhide, \$675 at Bauhaus 2 Your House, bauhaus2yourhouse.com

THE STORY OF ANNE AND HANNAH BARRETT — sisters who not only purchased and gut-renovated a circa 1895 single-family town house in Jamaica Plain, but then happily moved into it together with their significant others — may make some readers skeptical. Anne, 39, is an architect. Hannah, 41, is an artist and art professor. At first glance, the sisters, who grew up in Reading, Pennsylvania, seem to occupy opposite ends of the style spectrum. Anne is a modernist. Hannah's style is "vintage eclectic," she says. How did they find a way to agree on the hundreds of big and small decisions that must be made when renovating a home? Just how ugly did it get? Surely, the drywall must be riddled with telltale fist-sized patches.

Actually, there are no such holes. The couples peacefully share the four-story end-unit town house on quaint Everett Street. They executed a massive project together with a minimum of drama and conflict. They are like an "after" family

Kris Frieswick is a freelance writer in Boston. Send comments to magazine@globe.com.

DOWNSTAIRS

CLEAR ADVANTAGES The living room on the main floor of Hannah Barrett and Laurel Sparks's condo mixes IKEA bookshelves and kitchen cabinets with a 30E Design table and Philippe Starck-designed chairs. The painting is by a New York-based friend of the couple's, Carrie Moyer.



GET THE LOOK

Hannah Barrett and Laurel Sparks use test-tube-shaped bulbs in these 20-inch-long modern, scaled-down pendant lamps. A shorter IKEA version has a similarly sleek, bare look.



HIGH
Glass-shaded illuminating Experiences Meltemi pendant lamp, \$290 at Illuminations by Barre Electric, Glen Road Plaza, West Lebanon, New Hampshire, 603-298-8036, barreelectric.com



LOW
Plastic-shaded IKEA Pabo pendant lamp, \$14.99 at IKEA, 1 Ikea Way, Stoughton, 781-344-4532, ikea.com

on an episode of *Dr. Phil*. For instance, guess how they decided which couple got which two-story unit?

"We flipped a coin," says Anne, who, with her husband, Todd Dundon, also an architect, got the top unit. "We did it before we even started demolition."

"It just seemed to be the fairest way to do it," says Hannah, who lives with her girlfriend, Laurel Sparks, 35, also an artist and art professor, in the bottom two floors. Weird.

IN 2003, WHEN THEIR SCHEME WAS HATCHED, THE couples lived on opposite coasts; Hannah and Laurel in



FAMILY PORTRAIT Bottom row, from left: Hannah Barrett and Laurel Sparks; top row, from left: Anne Barrett and Todd Dundon (shown in their apartment).



KITCHEN BEFORE



GET THE LOOK

For their kitchen clock, Hannah and Laurel bought a knockoff version of an icon of mid-century design — one that's still being produced. (Their orange clock isn't made anymore, but the red one is close.)



HIGH

Reproduction Nelson Ball Clock, \$315 at Design Within Reach

LOW

Knockoff ball clock, \$32 at Bowl & Board, 1354 Beacon Street, Brookline, 617-566-4726, and other locations, bowlandboard.com

THE LONG VIEW From the new kitchen (above), a view into the living room, where another of Laurel's paintings hangs over the couch. Laurel found the fabric for the curtains online.



Jamaica Plain and Anne and Todd in Los Angeles, where she worked as a residential architect “doing \$20 million McMansions,” Anne says, and Todd worked on commercial properties for the Gensler architectural firm (he has transferred to the company’s Boston office). Both of the Barretts had attended Wellesley College, and both love New England. So, partly fueled by Anne’s desire to start her own architecture firm and partly by the sisters’ desire, Anne says, to “be close to each other so we could hang out,” the two couples decided to buy a home together.

Nervous about house hunting in expensive Boston in a peak market, they embarked on a disheartening search in places as far away as Providence, where one agent showed them a home next to a prison halfway house. (Hannah remembers the agent assuring them, “You can’t ask for better neighbors. They’re constantly monitored.”) They finally found their place in Jamaica Plain in February 2004. It is one of three attached buildings making up a brick mini-block that might have been airdropped in from Back Bay. The house had been in the same family since 1938 and had been sliced and diced and used as multiple small units — a warren of hallways, doors, and dark rooms. With its four floors that could become two spacious two-bedroom, two-bath units, both couples thought it was perfect, and, at \$570,000, it was in → PAGE 72

DOWNSTAIRS



GIRLS' CLUB What color do two artists choose for their bedroom walls? Benjamin Moore Pink Pearl. The bedspread was a gift from Hannah's mother to Laurel.

Amazing Space!

Outdoor living...Indoors!



Call for a Complimentary Planning Guide!

A Four Seasons Sunroom conservatory addition is an extraordinary way to bring a whole new dimension of light and space into your life. Let our design professionals provide a complimentary no-obligation survey to show you how simply and easily a sunroom will enhance your home. **SAVE 20% with FREE CONSERVAGLASS™ UPGRADE!**

Made in America for Over 30 Years



South of Boston & Cape Cod
Sandcastle Group
800-696-1234
600 Plain Street (Rte 139), Marshfield
sandcastlegroup.net

North of Boston
Sunspas
800-424-0090
230C South Main St. (Rte 114), Middleton
sunspas.net

West of Boston
New England Spas & Sunrooms
800-258-5300
35 Worcester Road (Rte 9 West), North
newengspas.com

Upstairs, Downstairs

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 56



NEW KID The town house is in a row of similar-looking brick Victorians (though only one - the sisters' - has an orange front door).

their price range; Hannah and Laurel budgeted an additional \$100,000 for the renovations, and Anne and Todd \$110,000. They bought the house as a single-family with a jointly held loan but then registered with the city as a condominium so they could refinance their units with separate loans. "We pretty much did everything we advise

our clients not to do," says Anne, who has since opened a residential architecture and furniture design firm, 30E Design, with behind-the-scenes help from Todd, who is now 39. "We did business with family; we moved in with family; we did business with friends; we went with the lowest bidder. We did at least the top five things you

should never do." Then the fun began.

Anne and Todd started drawing up plans on the plane ride back to Los Angeles the day after signing the papers to buy the house. Hannah had no problems leaving all of the architectural decisions to her younger sister. "Every place Anne's been, she's always created this incredible atmosphere, and I wanted that," Hannah says. "And we had all our architectural fees waived."

The perils of such a project must have been obvious to those closest to them. The Barrett parents "were terrified," Hannah says. About what? The financial ramifications or that Anne and Hannah would harm each other during the process? "All of the above," Hannah says.

"They could not understand," Anne says. "When they saw the building inside, they couldn't visualize it, and they were like, 'Oh, my God. What are you doing?'"

THE DESIGN STAGE TOOK PLACE UNDER deep cover. Anne and Todd both had jobs in Los Angeles and weren't ready to tell their bosses they were moving across the country in six months; yet they had a house to redesign on the side. "It was really stressful for us," says Anne. "From February to July, we were working on these drawings in secret. Hannah and Laurel would call me at work with questions about stuff that needed to be answered, and I couldn't really discuss it at work - and there was a three-hour time difference."

Neither of the architects in the family had any area contacts in the construction business, so they hired a friend of Hannah's as contractor. Since they were locals, Hannah and Laurel were to oversee the project. Then, against Anne's strong advice, Hannah and Laurel moved into the building before construction began but after they sold their previous home, hoping just to move from floor to floor. That was in April. They moved back out of the place in August. Their first contractor quit to return to a project she had thought was on long-term delay. The next contractors, recommended by a sculptor friend, were less than detail-oriented, but at least they were on the job. The project pressed forward.

The entire house had to be rewired and replumbed. There were no heating ducts, and the top two floors, not occupied since the '70s, still had the building's original match-lit water heaters. Because the structure had been filled with many small rooms, walls had to be knocked down to create the new, open floor plans. Because it was a single-family house, walls had to be built to create the separate condos. The main entrance now leads to two doors - one entering the lower apartment, the other leading upstairs. Old coal-fired heating units had to be removed from inside each of the two fireplaces that were located on every floor. The exterior walls got new plaster, and

the hardwood floors were refinished. New bathrooms - one of the four baths has a heated floor - were added. Windows were cut into outside walls. The backyard had to be regraded and landscaped.

Anne and Todd left LA in late October. This was the hardest part for Hannah. "They had told their work when they were quitting and when they were driving across country," says Hannah. "Knowing that Todd and Anne were coming to a shell in October, that was really stressful."

UNABLE TO MOVE INTO THE HOUSE when they arrived, Anne and Todd spent a few weeks couch-surfing with a series of friends. They finally moved in before Thanksgiving, at which point the windows in an upstairs bedroom - which, while they were still in California, the first contractor had sworn did not need to be replaced - literally fell out of their casings. It took weeks and weeks for the new windows to arrive. January is not an ideal time to wait for new windows.

All in all, the renovation project was a success. It took less than a year to go from rabbit warren to fully renovated and updated home. They brought the project in within about 10 percent of their budget. And, most impressive of all, the sisters still love and enjoy each other.

"We've had some stressful conversations," says Anne, "but there weren't lots of them."

"We put all our money into this," says Hannah. "We didn't want to lose our shirts. Plus, we all have to live together."

"We still take vacations together," says Anne.

"We miss each other if we go too many days without seeing each other," adds Laurel. "It's really true."

Laurel pauses, then turns to Anne. "Did you tell her about the gong?"

"I didn't tell her about the gong."

"You have to tell her about the gong."

"It's a house secret," says Anne. Then all eyes move to the cocktail bar in the corner of Anne and Todd's dining area. There's a gong hanging there from a silk rope.

"It's the cocktail gong," says Hannah, as Anne taps lightly on the brass disk, which is about a foot in a diameter. A deep and resonant tone, capable of penetrating even the sturdy new walls, sounds.

Clearly, the Barretts are an advanced species of sisters: loving, respectful, and highly cooperative. But they also share a common bond more powerful than blood, shared financial burdens, and shared walls - a bond that can hold a family together through even the worst of times. They share a deep and abiding commitment to the cocktail hour.

"We hear that gong all the way down in the basement," Hannah says with a grin. ■

See 800 Paintings On-Line!



And several hundred more at the gallery. Original work by over 200 artists always in stock!

J. TODD GALLERIES

www.jtodd.com

Gallery Hours:
Tues. - Sat.: 10:30 - 5:30 Sun.: 1 - 5PM

572 Washington Street,
Route 16, Wellesley Square
781-237-3434

Glide Upstairs on a Stannah Stairlift!

- A family business since 1862
- FREE in home evaluation
- Ideal for narrow stairs & tight turns
- Guaranteed buy back
- Visit our showroom

www.stannah.com Stannah Since 1862

Call for a FREE information kit now!
1-800-877-8247

101 Constitution Blvd., Suite C Franklin, MA 02038-2588

"Shaker Flat Screen TV Stand with Bookcases"

The perfect combination of style and function.

Cherry Oak Maple

Custom work is our specialty!

Cherrystone FURNITURE
(The new name for The Oak Gallery)

Lexington • 201 Mass Ave. Littleton • 160 Ayer Road
781-861-1500 978-486-9846
www.cherrystonefurniture.com

CLOSETCRAFT THE BEST SPACE PLACE

*** FREE INSTALLATION *** Closets and Armoires

- Free In-Home Computerized Design • Lifetime Warranty
- 100% Satisfaction Guaranteed • http://members.aol.com/closetcraft/

A Family-owned Company • Established 1991
(617) 923-3999 • Watertown, MA • 1-800-649-0313

GUARANTEED LOWEST PRICES! • GUARANTEED LOWEST PRICES! • GUARANTEED LOWEST PRICES!

Save BIG BUCKS
It's Worth The Trip

ALL BARS & BAR STOOLS, BILLIARD TABLES, GAME TABLES
Ping Pong | Air Hockey | Foosie Ball | Bubble Hockey
ARE ON SALE NOW!!
FLOOR MODELS AT ADDITIONAL SAVINGS!!

Bemister's POOL & PATIO SWIMMING POOLS • SPAS
PATIO FURNITURE • GAS GRILLS
BILLIARD TABLES AND BAR STOOLS ON DISPLAY

SALEM, NH - 57 SO. Broadway - Rte 28 (Rte 93 to Exit 1 to Rte 209 - 1/2mi on right)
Hours: M-F 10-9; Sat 10-5; Sun 12-5 (603) 890-9698
HAMPTON, NH - 575 Lafayette Rd - Rte 1 (Approx. 1/2 mi North of Gayley Hatch)
Hours: M-F 10-8; Sat 10-5; Sun 12-5 (603) 929-4447
www.bemisters.com

GUARANTEED LOWEST PRICES! • GUARANTEED LOWEST PRICES! • GUARANTEED LOWEST PRICES!