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WATERFRONT RENAISSANCE IN OCEANPORT

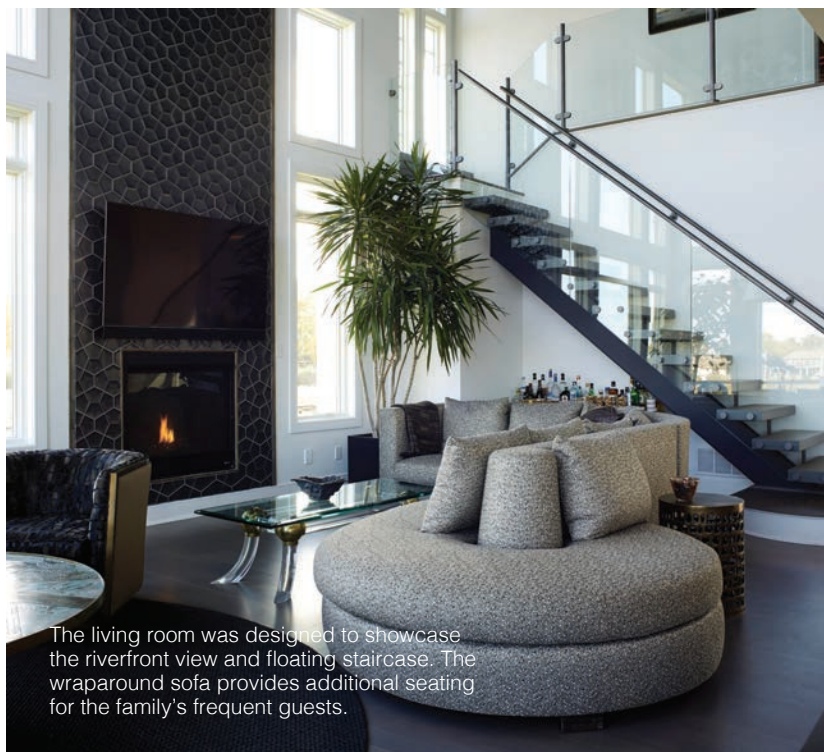
Charles Pavarini of Charles Pavarini Designs creates a haven of air and light by the Jersey Shore as a French Victorian chateau arises from Hurricane Sandy's coastal wreckage.

Story by Jean Quist | Photography by Phillip Ennis





Custom lighting is a Pavarini specialty. This multidimensional chandelier breaks up the soaring space of the living room's two-and-half-story ceiling and provides distinct contrast to the mosaic tile above the fireplace.



The living room was designed to showcase the riverfront view and floating staircase. The wraparound sofa provides additional seating for the family's frequent guests.

Perched on the banks of the Shrewsbury River, just west of where the river spills into Sandy Hook Bay, the town of Oceanport, NJ, was hit hard by Hurricane Sandy in late October of 2012. Among the more than 500 homes destroyed or substantially damaged was a French Victorian chateau that overlooks the river and lies in the path of an avian migration route. While the original structure had withstood previous storm damage during its 100-year history, the havoc wrought by the Atlantic superstorm was too devastating to repair. The grand old dame stood empty for the next few years.

It was not forgotten, however. Among the locals drawn to the property at the end of Monmouth Boulevard was Lisa Denholtz, who would frequently visit the homesite and eat lunch on the old deck while watching the birds migrate. She fell in love with the location and nicknamed it “Two Swans.” In 2015 she and husband Steven Denholtz, co-owners of Denholtz Custom Homes, purchased the property and began to rebuild it. New Jersey coastal building regulations limited the outside scope of the home to its original footprint, and the newlyweds decided to recreate the original façade of the chateau. But the back of the building and its interior were reborn in a fresh, contemporary design.

While construction was getting underway—including the 10-foot pilings on which the house now sits—Lisa visited the annual Kips Bay Decorator Show House in New York City, which featured the work of New York City-based interior designer Charles Pavarini III. Six months later, her partnership with Charles on the Oceanport house began.

Architecture and Design Antecedents

It could be said that Charles Pavarini was born into building design. His grandfather's company, Pavarini Construction, is known for creating historic landmark buildings, including New York's Seagram Tower, the United Nations building and the State Theater at Lincoln Center, among others. Charles was an early student of musical theater, as a performer, costume de-





Floor-to-ceiling glass walls bring the outside indoors. The view showcases the avian migration route that first drew the owners to the building site.



signer and set designer. He turned to architecturally-based interior design after enrolling in a certificate program at the New York School of Interior Design (NYSID), where he quickly realized he had a talent for drawing and interior design. “My first sketch class made me realize I had talent,” recalls Charles. “That initial spark from one instructor gave me the confidence to go on and get my Bachelor of Fine Arts.” His work won him NYSID’s bronze medal for achievement and his first job in interior design, as assistant to the iconic Ruben de Saavedra. Following that apprenticeship, Charles founded Pavarini Design nearly 30 years ago, and has won numerous awards for architectural interior design, custom furniture designs and innovative lighting elements.

The Kips Bay Decorators Show House has been a mainstay of the interior design world since its inception in 1973. First invited to participate in 2012, Charles has contributed his unique blend of traditional and contemporary design concepts to the show house for the past six years, in ad-



dition to serving as chairman of its Designer's Committee for the past eight years. "We always gain several clients through the show house," he says. "Lisa came several times during the show and talked to me about the Jersey project she and her husband were embarked on. Many people do that, and it's difficult to tell the truly interested from those just looking for DIY ideas, but six months later Lisa called me. We came on to the project in 2016, while the house was still under construction."

From the Outside In

"When we arrived onsite in Oceanport in the spring of 2016, the house was just being framed in, and we immediately found

there were design problems that the architect could not figure out," Charles recalls. "There was no powder room, and the entranceway, master bedroom and staircase needed work. They just could not get these elements to work with the vision Lisa had for the home. There were rooms—the master bedroom and living room in particular—that were all boxed in, which, given the lot on which the home sits, made no sense. So, as we usually do when we start a project that's still under construction, we started with the architectural elements first."

In all his projects, Charles incorporates the features of the lot and environs of the building site into his interior designs. "We



wanted to take advantage of the wonderful views of the lot the house sits on," he says. "We aimed to capture views of the water from every window. That's how the landscape really becomes the story of the home's interior."

First on the agenda was opening up the interior space itself. "The architect had boxed in both the living room and master bedroom upstairs with walls," says Charles. "You could not see the water! There aren't any immediate neighbors, so no one can see inside. The first thing we did was to frame the fireplace with glass walls on both sides, which expanded the entire feel of both the living room and master bedroom, which sits above the kitchen area. From the second-floor bedroom, the homeowners can now see all the way to ocean." The glass walls soar two-and-a-half stories, with the ever-changing coastal view as an essential design element.

Translating the Client's Desires

Steven and Lisa have a large blended family and love to entertain. The challenge was creating an open, welcoming space while remaining within the parameters of the client's personal design style. And Lisa had some very specific requirements. "When we design such a personal space, we really want to capture the style of the client and not put our own style into it," Charles explains. "And, in this instance, the client was very specific. She wanted the interior to feel very





contemporary. Specifically, she wanted all black walls and black floors. She didn't want any color. We guided her decisions in such a way that the house was not all black. She also had an Asian aesthetic, and we designed each room with very clean lines."

The main living space is open and flows from the entryway through the living room to the kitchen and dining area. Realizing the living room and its fireplace were significantly taller than the room's square footage, Charles dropped the ceiling level slightly, using ebony slatted boards to establish proportion. He paralleled this design in the master bedroom upstairs, so that in both rooms, the glass walls extend past the ceilings, creating airy spaces filled with natural light.

To maintain the unity of the open floor plan, the kitchen was designed with almost all the fixtures and appliances out of sight, shielded by an island built from ebony wood and black marble countertops. There are no upper cabinets, and the refrigerator is clad in bronze. Dropping the ceiling by two inches allowed for recessed lighting features; the ceiling itself mirrors the wood with ebony tile and bronze tile detail. In stark contrast, the walls throughout the open space are white marble. "What I found interesting," Charles says, "is that Lisa kept saying 'no color, no color, no color,' and then when the kitchen was completed she



Kitchen fixtures and appliances are artfully hidden to create an uninterrupted flow of space in the open floor plan. Ebony wood for the island pedestal and black marble countertops allow the painting to sit center stage.



brought in this painting of the lilies, which is so colorful, but it works beautifully in that space, especially with the outside water views.”

Clean, Well-Lighted Spaces

Upstairs, both the master bedroom and master bath continue the client’s desire for crisp lines and monochromatic interiors that allow the panorama of the river and bay beyond the windows to stand on its own. “Again, we kept as close as possible to Lisa’s desire for minimal color,” he says. “We dropped the bedroom ceiling for proportion with the glass walls rising above. This room is where the architect had originally sketched in solid walls, completely obscuring the view.”

Charles designed much of the master bedroom furniture as well, creating a platform bed that gives the illusion of floating in the room. He also designed all the lighting in the home, an integral and important element in all his designs. “There wasn’t even electricity in the house when we started the project,” he remembers. “I use lighting as a design element, not just for illumination.” The lighting throughout the home is either indirect and unobtrusive, operates as artistic pieces to focus

the eye on specific details, or enhances the ambience of its surrounding space.

The one room where Lisa wanted to forgo black and use white to emphasize its clean lines was the master bath. But once the room was completely framed in and ready for design, all white gave the room an anemic, overly antiseptic feel. Charles and his team found the whimsical black-on-white bamboo wallcoverings that grace two walls, while keeping fixtures and fittings to a minimum. The mirrors climb directly from countertops to ceiling, with indirect and accent lighting; the shower, walled with iridescent tiles by Ann Sacks and floored with clack river stones that massage the feet, features recessed lights that highlight the tiles’ shimmer.

An Asian Aesthetic

Sometimes referring to this residence as his “Origami-Influenced Shore House,” Charles complemented Lisa’s design requirements with subtle grace notes of her Asian aesthetic. Elements throughout the home’s design lend hints of origami paper, including the hand-thrown raised tiles of the fireplace surround, the upholstered velvet headboard in the master bed-





Hand-painted wallcoverings provide texture and contrast to the white fixtures. The shower stall to the right is lined with iridescent tile and illuminated with recessed lighting that adds light and depth.



This Tucker Robbins stool adds a touch of contemporary whimsy to the master bath and emphasizes the sleek, minimalist design of the room's other furnishings.



Pavarini extended the glass walls to the second floor for a panoramic river view. The dropped ceiling redefines the bedroom space and showcases the custom lighting.





The bed was designed with an upholstered velvet headboard to carry through the origami themes throughout the interior. The dresser is fashioned from ebony wood and fronted with embossed leather.



room, the bathroom's bamboo wallpaper and white lacquered cabinets, and the use of ebony tile or wood with bronze accents.

These touches only serve to highlight the Asian pieces of furniture in the home: the very tall Chinese lamp with a female abstract as its base, the floating staircase with its glass and tile-topped handrails that echo the soaring glass wall opposite it, and the occasional table in the master bedroom designed by Robert Kuo and glossed with 16 coats of Chinese lacquer. That table, notes Charles, "took nearly as long to make as the entire house design."

By emphasizing architecturally driven design, the integration of the living space with the nature surrounding it, and the unifying use of open, soaring spaces, Charles not only fulfilled the client's desire for minimal color and clutter, but also created an inviting interior, well suited to the family's needs. From the rubble of an iconic landmark destroyed by Mother Nature, he has created a home that celebrates all the natural beauty around it. In recognition of his Oceanport achievement, Charles was awarded First Place in the Interior Design Society's 2018 competition—Designer of the Year for Living Spaces Above \$30,000

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