

**T**RANSFORMING A CONDO in the clouds into an idyllic modern retreat

meant scouting the fair seas for inspiration **By Margaret Gilmour**  
Photographs by Catherine Tighe



**A GENEROUS WELCOME**  
In the entryway of Connie and Joe Smukler's Rittenhouse home, a sweep of limestone flooring anchors sleek cabinets clad in English sycamore. Beyond a cast-glass sculpture by Steve Tobin is the living room. "It's all on one elongated floor," says designer Vincent Smith-Durham. Turn to page 160 for additional information.



# SAFE HARBOR

#### WIDE OPEN SPACES

Large windows allow plenty of light into the home's main living space, where a highpile Scandinavian Rya rug of Connie Smukler's own design is a backdrop for a Saarinen dining table and Le Corbusier sofas and club chairs. To the left of the partition, a floor-to-ceiling shelf holds books and periodicals in the library; a movable glass panel is opened to join the two spaces. At left, a view from the front door sweeps past another glass sculpture by Steve Tobin.

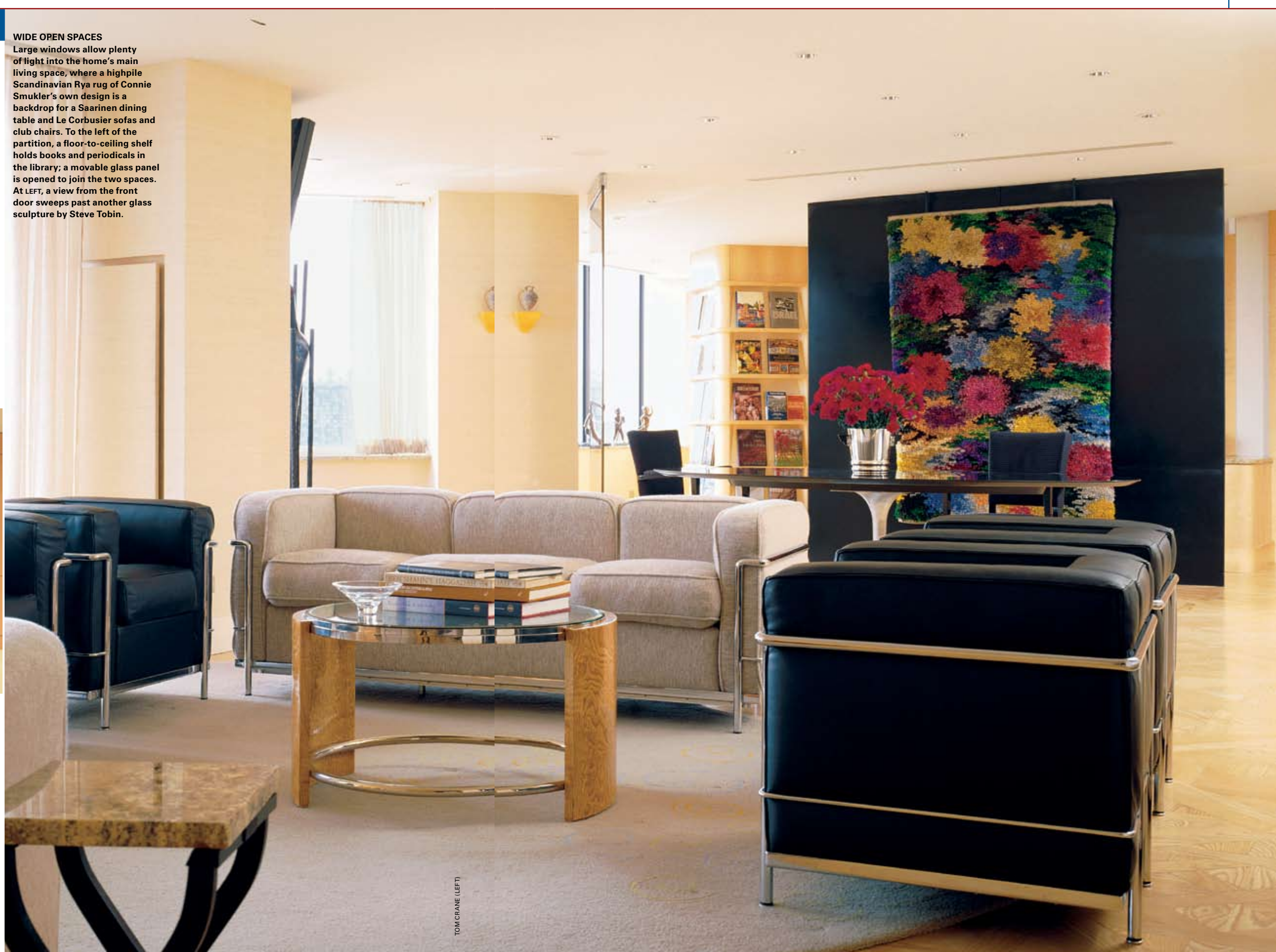
#### IF IT TRULY WERE A YACHT,

you might set sail, never again seeking dry land. But Connie and Joe Smukler's Rittenhouse apartment only feels like a luxury vessel, recalling classic glamour with its graceful lines, wood-paneled walls and sleek, linear spaces. Miles from the ocean, the 30th-floor apart-



ment bobs instead in the sky, taking in the view through walls of windows. On days when low-lying clouds settle in, it's easy to imagine that a foghorn will sound in the distance.

Like a yacht, the apartment is a private retreat for the Smuklers. "We wanted to create a haven from the fast pace of the city," says Connie. They also wanted to take full advantage of the view and available light while indulging their passion for modern design. And,

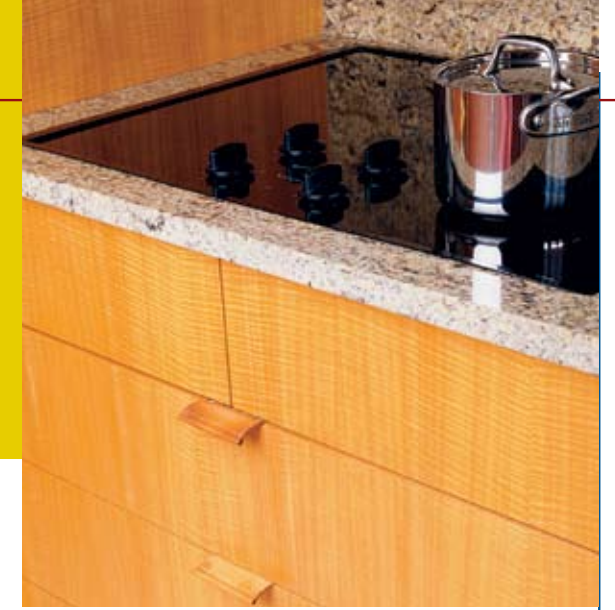


TOM CRANE (LEFT)



**BYZANTINE SPLENDOR**  
Triangular tiles in the master bathroom come from Cherry Hill tile artist Zola Bryen, with glazes made of platinum and 22-karat gold sprayed between sheets of glass. The alabaster counter and Venetian-plastered columns add to the glow.

**SLEEK AND CLEAN**  
The handsome sweep of cabinetry paneled in anigre wood with leather pulls, RIGHT, stretches from the entrance to the kitchen; a family samovar holds pride of place on the back wall, BELOW.



most significantly, they wanted all their living space on a single floor.

That wasn't always the plan. When the Smuklers bought their 30th-floor apartment, they also purchased the one below it on the 29th floor. They spent two years joining the two spaces and were on the cusp of moving in when the neighboring apartment on the 30th floor went up for sale. "It was a chance to start from scratch," says Connie. "We always wanted one flat with no stairs. We knew it was the right thing to do."

So the couple braced for another overhaul, undoing all their recently completed work to separate the two apartments. They brought in Mitchell Miller, president and CEO of Miller Robinson Construction in Huntingdon Valley and a specialist in high-rises, to combine the two 30th-floor spaces, while waiting out the second renovation on the 29th (they later sold that apartment).

With the help of West Chester architect Peter C. Archer and interior designer Vincent Smith-Durham, they came up with a plan that made the most of the layout of rooms by taking inspiration from deluxe ocean travel. "It's all on one elongated floor ... like a glamorous, 200-foot yacht," says Smith-Durham, president of Vincent Smith-Durham Objects for Room and Garden in Embreeville. "The living room is the bow of the boat. The dining room flows into the library, and the master suites make up the stern."

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#### SWEET DREAMS

Silk-covered walls and a Venetian-plaster ceiling make the serene master bedroom an extra-plush retreat. At right is a cylinder housing the master bathroom, paneled in the same Japanese tamo wood as the platform bed and nightstands. A pair of tub chairs form a quiet sitting area.



## Safe Harbor

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“When I first walked in, it was very dark,” says Archer, co-founder and partner of the firm Archer & Buchanan Architecture. “The rooms were a series of boxes that were confusing, and there was a long, narrow hallway at the back of the apartment.”

Archer had the walls removed and replaced them with two glass hinged panels and one fixed panel of steel that define the rooms while still keeping an open feel. The hinged panels can swing shut to partition off spaces without interrupting the flow of the open floorplan. When they are ajar, a single glance from the vestibule reveals most of the home, with only the bedrooms and bathrooms tucked away for privacy. “You’re experiencing the rooms of the house each day without necessarily using them,” Archer says. “They aren’t rooms you go to ‘visit.’”

In the hallway, where natural light couldn’t seep through, Archer built light fixtures directly into the walls. Thin vertical panels arch away from the walls near the ceiling, forming a niche for recessed bulbs. They beam upward to softly light the curved ceiling. “The walls became integral parts of the fixtures,” says Archer.

The Smuklers wanted a contemporary interior, but they didn’t want the space to feel cold or uninviting. So when they sat down with Archer and Smith-Durham to select an interior palette, they chose lots of natural materials: wood and glass, satin and silk.

The apartment doesn’t have a single painted surface; instead, wood paneling, grass cloth and silk soften the walls. “I always loved paneling,” says Connie, “and wood became a natural finish.” Pale, exotic woods encase the walls and floors: Japanese tamo in the bedroom, English sycamore in the living area, anigre in the kitchen. For Connie, the texture of their fine grains is the artwork



**TUNNEL VISION:** Joe Smukler’s bathroom is tiled to look like the Lincoln Tunnel because of the amount of time the couple spends traveling between Philadelphia and New York.

she might have hung. “The wood is just another craft in our home,” she says.

In the kitchen and library, cabinetry and shelving show off the smooth, patterned surfaces of the well-crafted wood. The kitchen cabinet doors don’t have hardware, glass cabinets or mullions to distract from their sleek finish, just leather-tapped drawer pulls.

The Smuklers incorporated their collection of huge glass pieces by sculptor Steve Tobin throughout the apartment. The pieces pick up accents like the greenish-hued glass top of a wood bar outside the kitchen, and triangular glass tiles in Connie’s bathroom that shimmer like a golden Fabergé egg. Cherry Hill tile artist Zola Bryen made the tiles and formed them into mosaics. The ever-changing luminescence comes from glazes made of platinum and 22-karat gold sprayed between sheets of clear or colored glass. “Our objective was to have a stunning room filled with lots of golden colors,” says Bryen. “The final design took on a Byzantine quality.”

The Smuklers and Smith-Durham selected a few Le Corbusier pieces, Jules Leleu tub chairs and a classic modern

Saarinen table. “It was a meeting of the minds,” Smith-Durham says. “Connie and Joe wanted minimalism, a friendly environment that was easy to care for—very contemporary.” He helped them merge the elegant, geometric forms of art deco—a style he introduced them to—with a pristine, clean contemporary look. “We had great respect and regard for each other,” Connie says. “The deco furniture and decorating style was a great foil for my rugs and our glass collection.”

Connie, a former student of the Barnes Foundation in Merion, designs the contemporary highpile Scandinavian Rya rugs herself. She occasionally sells the designs to Smith-Durham, who uses them for other projects.

“The beauty of Vincent is that he gets into your head and senses what will be right for you,” says Connie. “He made Joe and I the central force instead of foisting his ego onto us. He took our collections and made the apartment work with what we had.”

Now that it’s done, the Smuklers have a safe harbor from the hustle and bustle of life in the city. And they’re ready to drop anchor and stay. ■