

Live Well Home Style *by Andrea E. McHugh*



Though only steps from the ocean, Alan Pilla's seaside condo reflects a contemporary aesthetic, not a nautical theme

Waiting to Exhale

One New York-based attorney embraces island life as much as possible in a condo by the sea

When Alan Pilla and Kim LaFontaine first met, it was clear the two would become fast friends. So when Kim took a sledgehammer to his walls, he didn't bat an eye.

It was on his honeymoon that Alan first fell in love with Newport. Its relaxing vibe, unbeatable vistas and warm community lured the Bronx-born attorney to its sandy shores. "As I got older, I had less tolerance for planes, airports, trains and travel," says Alan, who at one time found himself jetting abroad frequently. "I'm like 'Norm' from *Cheers*. I want everyone to know my name." The couple had found a condominium set on an estate that offered a welcoming impression which would be perfect for weekend escapes from the Big Apple. It's iron-gated entry and stone pillars hinted at a deep history, despite the condominium being built circa 1985. Though its location across from First

Beach and steps from Cliff Walk were idyllic, the floor plan of the condo left much to be desired with choppy living spaces, limited natural light and cramped bathrooms. Despite its obstacles, the couple focused on the positives and didn't embark on any major changes. After an amicable divorce, Alan decided it was time restructure his second home to make it more functional, especially if he was going to be spending a little more time in the City-by-the-Sea.

Friend and interior designer Kim LaFontaine had Alan to dinner at her home a number of occasions when he commented one evening how much he liked her home's aesthetic. "He said he loved my style," explains Kim, and the conversation soon turned toward to the possibilities of his Newport home.

Though being just steps from the crashing surf of the Atlantic Ocean, Kim decided to eschew the all-too-familiar

coastal-inspired design and embrace a contemporary-meets-chic aesthetic to better match Alan's persona. "I think it really helped to get to know him first; his personality and his personal style. When you think of a condo literally across from the Cliff Walk, people automatically think coastal and beachy, but the more I thought about it and his personality, he's very contemporary.

While the overall style was identified, Kim's project was much more than new couches and paint colors. Knowing Alan's penchant for cooking and entertaining, Kim redesigned the floor plan to make the kitchen and dining room one contiguous space that was open and inviting. To do so, they would need to remove two walls that divided that area while ensuring the home's structural needs were still being met. Kim turned to Justin Zeller of Barrington-based Red House Custom

Building to make her vision a reality.

"As a custom builder, I have a real hard time with a lot of the condos here in Rhode Island and even in Portland when I lived there," says Justin. Sub-par craftsmanship and materials, unimaginative design and even ignored basic design principles are just some of the obstacles. Oftentimes, says Justin, when a builder starts opening walls, they'll discover even more challenges, but in this case, he made an advantageous discovery: a "double" wall that once removed, would give them even more space for both the master and guest baths.

"Now I walk into the place and I want to move in," laughs Justin. "It's a bachelor pad in a lot of ways, but it's the kind of décor I think anyone would enjoy - fresh, contemporary but classic at the same time." After the experience, Justin says he hopes to work with Kim as

Photography: Michael Cavalli

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much as possible, and today considers Alan and Kim good friends.

"It's nothing I would have selected," says Alan about his home, and he means it as a compliment. Though he has indulged his passion for music by having every room wired for speakers as well as having a television in every room so the voracious hockey fan will never miss a game, Alan's home is decidedly polished while also offering a hospitable vibe. "When we first started, I thought everything was going to have to be powder blue and very *Coastal Living* magazine." Much to his delight, the space is sleek and chic with subtle coastal nods, including the hand-made driftwood coffee table crafted by local artisan Chris Cobb. The biggest challenge, says Kim,

was the master bath, where Alan had requested a large, glass shower and a separate Jacuzzi tub. "We were able to find a Jacuzzi tub small enough for the area that still allows for a nice size vanity and it came out way beyond my expectations," she confides. "I found tile that lent itself to the contemporary feel. It's definitely my favorite bathroom I've ever done - certainly not the biggest, but it just delivers."

Today, after a morning surf session across the street, Alan can simply walk back home, shed the salt water in his comfortable contemporary bath and embrace all the things that made him fall in love with Newport in the first place. "It all starts when I cross that bridge," he says.

Photography: Michael Cavalli