



LIVING LARGE

DESIGNER EUGENE LAWRENCE MAKES THE MOST OF A TINY CONDO BY USING BOLD COLORS AND HEFTY FURNITURE. BY REGINA COLE

Bob Gruhl's condo at One Charles Street South happily disproves most – if not all – of the widely disseminated “truths” about decorating a small living space. The studio apartment, which measures little more than 350 square feet, makes use of bold, saturated color, hefty furniture, and large-scale art. The overall effect is expansive, warm, comfortable, and deceptively spacious. There's even room for Gruhl's collection of nautical art and memorabilia.

“All of the creature comforts are here, and none are skimpy-looking or too small for comfort,” says Eugene Lawrence, the Boston interior designer who created the decor for Gruhl. “There's a generous dining table, which can be expanded to seat up to eight, a big sofa, where you can sink deeply into soft cushions, comfortable upholstered chairs grouped around the coffee table for conversations, and good lighting for reading or entertaining.”

The living room also serves as Gruhl's bedroom, thanks to the 100-year-old answer to tight quarters: a Murphy bed.

“I never thought I'd be so delighted,” says Gruhl, whose consulting company serves the insurance and financial industries. “I'm familiar with how a lot of New York apartments use Murphy beds, but Gene took this room to a level far above anything I'd seen before.”

Gruhl sought out Lawrence's services on the recommendation of a friend. “Since the space was so small, I knew I'd need advice from a first-class interior decorator,” he says. Still, some of Lawrence's creative ideas were initially a hard sell with his new client.

“He asked me, ‘What's your favorite color?’ and I answered, ‘Red: It's vibrant and full of life,’” Gruhl says. “So he said, ‘OK, let's make the living room walls red.’ I was skeptical and raised all the usual objections – the room's too small; red is fine for accents but too bright for large surfaces; it'll make the walls close in. But, instead, it feels soft, comfortable, and the texture seems to blur the hard edges of the room.” The walls have a tone-on-tone vertical stripe pattern, which, in addition to adding texture, creates the illusion of greater height.

From the entry hall, which Lawrence painted white, the 15-by-18-foot living room takes on an additional presence and becomes the focal point. The hall “is wide enough so that we can treat it as a separate room,” says Lawrence. A glass-topped console table displays a model sailboat and two of Gruhl's favorite paintings. “I found them in New Bedford years ago,” he says. “This is the first place I've hung them where they look as though they belong.”

Other pieces from his art collection are displayed on walls, floors, and tabletops, but when he wanted to cover a wall with some of his pictures, Lawrence suggested a different approach.

“Gene said, given the size of the room, one big piece would work better than lots of pieces of art. Again, I was skeptical,” Gruhl says. Lawrence prevailed, and a large tapestry, with a marine motif, hangs on the wall.

“It's far more effective, making the room feel bigger than it is,” says Lawrence. “When it's illuminated at night, the room becomes quite magical.”

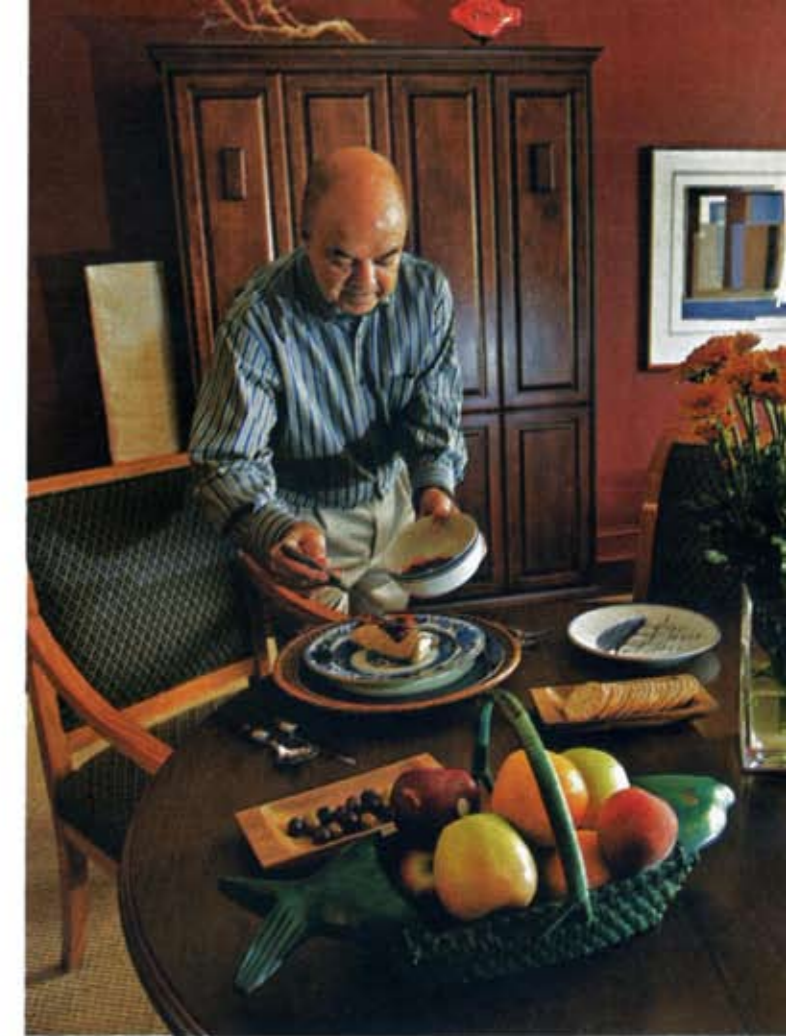
A neutral sisal covers the living room floor. The blues of the armchair upholstery and of the tapestry are echoed in the sophisticated diamond-patterned fabric on the seats and backs of the dining chairs. Under the coffee table, a wicker basket holds books and magazines.

“I raised a family in Marblehead and have lived on the Boston waterfront, so I've lived in some pretty special and beautiful places,” Gruhl says. “But this works extremely well for relaxing, as well as for dinner parties or for casual entertaining.”

He adds: “I'm on the road a great deal of the time, and this is a wonderfully easy and comfortable place to come home to. I get on the sofa, turn on some music, and read.” ■

Design

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CREATURE COMFORTS In his 350-square-foot condo, Bob Gruhl (above) has room to entertain at his substantial dining table, whose large scale is in keeping with the hefty upholstered pieces and massive tapestry in the living/dining room (facing page).

