

HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE CHEFS' RECIPE SECRETS BEST BUBBLY WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS

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AT THE JERSEY SHORE

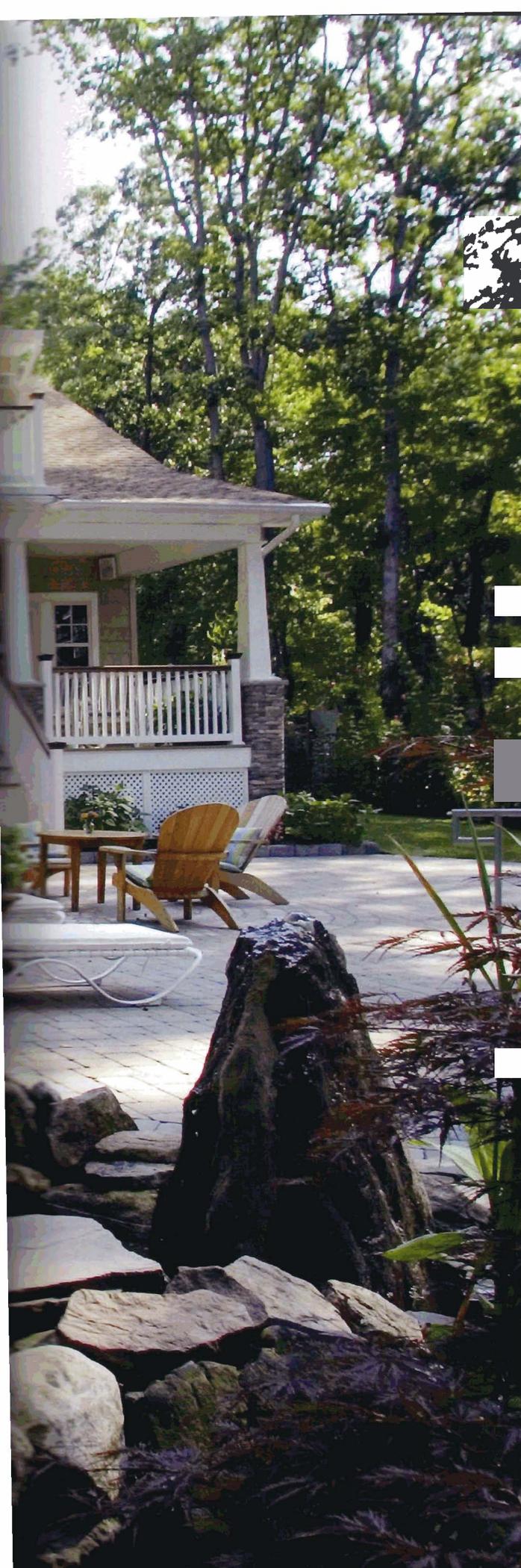


Season's Greetings
from Asbury Park

Danny DeVito on Life, Liberty & Limoncello



Alan Kosa and Tom Smith wanted a house that would welcome the outdoors inside and blend in with the environment. "It's comfortable," Kosa says. "We didn't make a house that's about being grand."



Built to bedazzle

Shark River Shangri-La is Craftsman-style perfection

Alan Kosa is a retail and residential interior designer. Tom Smith, a managing director and chief of compliance at JPMorgan Asset Management, keeps the firm out of trouble with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

What both men bring to their very different professions is a laser-beam focus on the nitty-gritty. Getting the details right is paramount in each of their fields.

That same careful precision is evident in their dazzling, 2-year-old Craftsman-style home in the Shark River Hills section of Neptune. Nestled among the tall trees like a beautiful bird, with a commanding view of the river below, the three-bedroom bungalow literally has stopped traffic along sedate Pinewood Drive as passersby drink in all those delicious details.

They're ga-ga over the gently sloping roof lines, the wicker-green shingles, the custom-made Craftsman windows and light fixtures, the William Morris-inspired pergola that lets the

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light shine down upon a front porch of shimmering, copper quartzite slate from India and the "waterline" of dry-stack stone that wraps along the foundation in the front of the house, anchoring it to a rugged landscape, softened by a profusion of Shasta daisies, day lilies, gentle Japanese maples and feathery pines.

When Kosa and Smith, both 52, are outdoors, they can scarcely get a chore in edgewise for all the people who stop to ask about this or that, or simply to congratulate them.

"I've never experienced that before, and I've lived in nice houses," says Smith, who grew up along Long Island's Great South Bay. "A lot of people have told me it's the nicest house they've ever seen — not just in the area, but anywhere. And I'm like, 'Wow, how did this happen?'"

Yes, pray tell, how?
It all started six years ago when Kosa and Smith went looking for a third house.

The fact that the couple already owned a condominium in the upscale Harmon Cove Towers in Secaucus, as well as a summer home on Fire Island, off Long Island, might not suggest the need for a third residence in the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area, but they had their reasons.

As anyone who has been there can attest, the ever-worsening summertime traffic can dampen anyone's ardor for Fire Island, particularly after a four- or five-hour Sunday night crawl back to Manhattan. Also, the island effectively shuts down in

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STORY BY SHANNON MULLEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BOB BIELK

the off-season. Though they frequently travel abroad, Kosa and Smith wanted a year-round retreat, ideally within a civilized commute of the city.

Kosa was well-acquainted with the Jersey Shore, having lived in Tinton Falls for a spell while he was doing design work for the Bamberger's department store chain.

They looked at properties along the beach in Monmouth and Ocean counties, but felt drawn to the secluded heights and water views of Shark River Hills, which reminded them of Maine and Cape Cod.

It was Smith who stumbled upon the Pinewood Drive property while scouting the area by car. The house, barely visible on the densely forested lot, was an almost 1,600-square-foot Craftsman-style bungalow built from a Sears, Roebuck kit in 1925 and later expanded.

It had seen better days: Tree roots had undermined the foundation and the basement was full of mold, Kosa says.

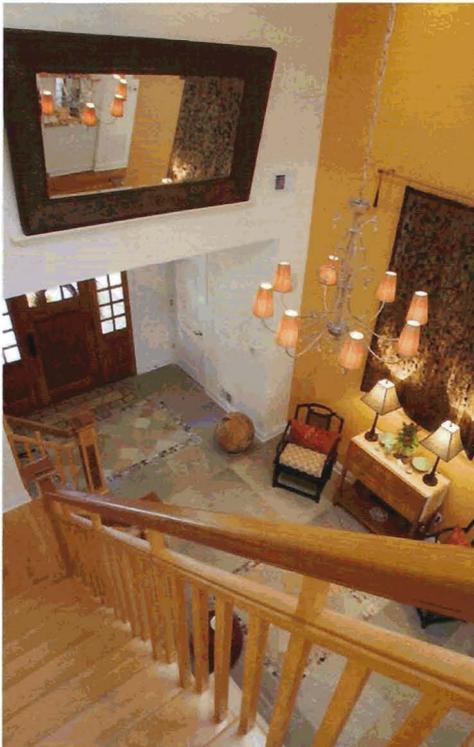
Initially, they talked about razing the bungalow and rebuilding on the same foundation.

But the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks and the resulting downturn of the U.S. economy postponed any definitive decisions, due to the couple's uncertainty about the housing market. They went ahead and closed on the property, in December 2001, for a price of \$314,000 – but more than a year would pass before they refocused on what to do with it.

In the interim, Kosa and Smith solicited a lot of advice, and the consensus was that starting from scratch, though hardly the economical route, was the way to go. The new house, the couple decided, would retain the Craftsman style but provide more than double the living space, about 3,400 square feet.

Kosa had developed an appreciation for Craftsman homes while living in Portland, Ore., from 1988 to 1997, when he worked for the Meier & Frank department store chain. The Craftsman style is far more prevalent in

From top: The master bedroom's balcony offers a bird's-eye view of the Shark River and the cobblestone patio, where Kosa and Smith often entertain. The couple drew inspiration from Frank Lloyd Wright in designing their library. The foyer's chief raison d'être is to give a prized tapestry from Venice (hanging on the wall to the right) the space and attention it richly deserves.



The clean lines of the Craftsman style harmonize well with contemporary elements, a winning combination that makes the "great room" – with its wall of windows, modern bar and stone fireplace – live up to its name.

the Northwest than it is at the Jersey Shore.

The American Craftsman movement, which placed a premium on simplicity of design and high-caliber craftsmanship, started in the final years of the 19th century as a reaction against the excesses of the Gilded Age and the cheap, mass-produced bric-a-brac that characterized the twilight of the Victorian era. Craftsman homes were typically one- or one-and-a-half story bungalows with low roof lines, four-sided, tapered column supports, airy front porches, an open floor plan, exposed beams and rafters, and built-in nooks for storage and seating. The idea was to blend in with the environment, not dominate it, so there was an emphasis on using wood, stone and other natural materials from the area.

The Craftsman style appealed to Kosa and Smith because its clean lines and tidy, almost Asian minimalism created all kinds of interesting possibilities for blending traditional and contemporary elements. The style also fit perfectly with their vision for a house that would invite their garden indoors.

From the start, Kosa and Smith were determined to be extremely hands-on with the project, with Kosa taking the design lead. It was vital that the professionals they hired to implement their very definite ideas felt comfortable with that sort of working relationship, and just as importantly, that they shared the couple's enthusiasm for creating something special. It wasn't all sunshine and roses: The couple switched architects mid-stream, betting on Vasilios Cocoros of Fort Lee for the stretch run.

When Kosa and Smith looked around

for a builder, they found exactly what they were looking for in Sallie Dwyer.

Dwyer, 44, and her husband, Chris, 33, own C&S Custom Builders Inc., based in Shark River Hills, where they both grew up and still live.

Sallie Dwyer, one of the few women builders in the area, started the company in 1999, although she didn't work full-time until after the couple's son, Colin, was born in 2002. Since then, they've built and remodeled dozens of homes throughout Monmouth and Ocean counties, although they've done the bulk of their work in Shark River Hills.

"They were probably my No. 1 customer to deal with. They were very involved," Sallie Dwyer says of Kosa and Smith.

"Designing the house for them was a pleasure because they knew what they wanted, and they put together some amazing materials."

As the name suggests, the Craftsman movement sought to empower skilled tradesmen – who as a group were becoming increasingly marginalized by mass production.

Kosa and Smith had a similar point of view. "With the craftsmen we used," Kosa says, "once they saw how detail-oriented we were, it raised the bar for them and everybody seemed to put out their best effort in their craft." As a result, the house evolved into a showcase for the talents of such craftsmen as Manuel Alves, a tile installer based in Hillside, who clearly rose to the challenge.

In fact, the landscaper Kosa and Smith hired, Fred Burns of Fred's Creative Landscaping in Brick, is still hard at



The view from Pinewood Drive: The house has literally stopped traffic, and inspired other homeowners. "It's a compliment when people ask you about the details and try to bring them into their own home," Kosa says.



The gourmet kitchen has dark maple cabinets with self-closing drawers, granite countertops and a breakfast nook with a 7-foot-long table made from reclaimed mango wood.

work after two years on the job.

In addition to his planting, Burns built an underground drainage system, a cobblestone driveway and backyard patio with a water feature and hot tub, and a large retaining wall along the side of the house, where Kosa and Smith purchased a paper road and had it filled in to expand the property to just under one acre.

"It's been very interesting and very enjoyable," says Burns, who describes his work for Kosa and Smith as "one of my better projects – if not the best."

Kosa and Smith, who entertain in Shark River Hills most weekends, designed their new home with their future guests in mind.

They knew from experience, for example, that no matter how lovely and comfortable the rest of the house was, their friends would inevitably congregate in the kitchen, so the couple made sure their kitchen, done in dark chocolate and espresso tones and brimming with high-end appliances, had loads of elbow room – enough to dance in, probably.

"I had 12 in here at Thanksgiving, with people cooking and just chatting, and we never felt crowded," Kosa says.

As cozy as the kitchen is, the "great room" just beyond it has its own special magnetism. With its wall of windows rising to a 26-foot cathedral ceiling and exposed, cedar beams, it makes you feel like you've climbed into a chic treehouse – well-appointed with a snazzy, built-in



bar (Kosa and Smith designed the piece themselves), a gas-ignited, wood-burning fireplace whose dry-stack stone surround runs all the way up the wall, and a 50-inch LG plasma television.

The adjoining dining room in the center of the house has an expandable, flame mahogany table in the style of Scottish-American furniture-maker Duncan Phyfe, surrounded by black wicker chairs upholstered in black- and white-stripped Sunbrella cushions.

Flanked by a pair of oil paintings of Lake Como by artist Mallory Lake, a pocket door opens to an informal library, inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright, with a gas fireplace. One of Kosa's original paintings, of clown-mime Bob Berky, hangs on one wall. A door to the left leads to the downstairs guest suite. (There's another one upstairs.)

Kosa envisioned the master bedroom as a "Ritz Carlton retreat." Done in shades of ivory and white, it has a gas fireplace and an outdoor balcony overlooking the river.

Construction began in August 2004 and ended 14 months later. Kosa and Smith moved in the week before Thanksgiving 2005. They've since sold their home on Fire Island, so the couple and their 16-year-old Parson Russell terrier, Butchie, now split time between Secaucus and Shark River Hills.

Kosa, who was putting in long days as a shop design manager for Liz Claiborne, Inc. in New York City when the house project began, has since left the company and struck out on his own, trading as Alan Kosa Interiors. Being able to design his own home from the ground up was enormously fulfilling, Kosa says, and Smith couldn't be happier with how it all turned out.

"I find it completely relaxing and I love to entertain there," Smith says. "A bit of a Shangri-La" is how he describes it, and the home's growing number of admirers would heartily concur. ★

Above: Windows in the master bath let light spill into a shower with as many nozzles as a drive-thru car wash.