

! J A C K P O T

Written by Estelle Bond Guralnick / Photographed by Eric Roth





*Interior
designer*
**MICHAEL
FERZOCO**
*enlivens a
Back Bay condo
for its young
new owners*

THE EYE-CATCHING abstract painting by David Palmer in the informal eating area reflects off the mirror-like black granite countertop in the adjoining kitchen. Eleven Interiors deftly created a fresh modern environment in this unit located in a stately, century-old Back Bay building (RIGHT).





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IS IT A CONTRADICTION FOR A DUPLEX PENTHOUSE apartment to be lighthearted, playful, and exquisitely polished, all at the same time? No, answers Michael Ferzoco, who gave his then 27-year-old clients exactly that in the transformation of a large, rather grand condominium in a staid old Back Bay building overlooking Boston's historic Commonwealth Avenue Mall.

It's a storybook saga, from start to finish. The young clients, Matthew Hawrilenko, who grew up in Hanover, Massachusetts, and his now wife, Emily Kroshus of Calgary, Alberta, met as freshmen at Princeton University, where she majored in economics and was a three-time All-American runner, while he studied public policy, was a varsity wrestler, and played professional poker during his junior and senior years. After graduation, he spent two years in finance at an options-trading firm where "poker culture" reigned as a learning aid for quick decision making.

Since then, he's been on his own as a highly respected professional poker player whose accomplishments include winning the 2009 World Series of Poker \$5,000 No-Limit Hold'em Six-Handed event. "Poker playing was a better fit for our lifestyle," he says. "It enabled us to take long 'working vacations' in Paris, Australia, New Zealand, where I could work wherever there was an Internet [connection]."

In 2008, the couple put down roots in Boston when Kroshus was accepted into a doctoral program in public health at Harvard University. Apartment hunting was frustrating at first. They knew what they wanted and where they wanted to live, but it wasn't until their real estate agent connected them with Ferzoco, principal of Eleven Interiors of Boston, New York, and Los Angeles, and his design colleague, Stacy Cournotes, that they found the right space with the potential to satisfy their goals. "As soon as we talked to Michael and Stacy, we knew they 'got' us, right out of the gate," Hawrilenko says. "We knew that they could design what we were going for."

Ferzoco says the biggest challenge was to make a traditional

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ELEGANCE WITH A LIVELY twist is the theme in the living room (FACING PAGE), where asymmetrical bookcases flank one of four fireplaces in the apartment. Pale gray walls are set off by white woodwork, and the high-gloss swivel coffee table and custom shag rug are accented by rich blue, no-fade Sunbrella fabric on the custom daybed-inspired window seats. Interior designer Michael Ferzoco plays pool (ABOVE) at the other end of the room where a poker table is also right at home. The open kitchen (LEFT) draws plenty of light from the large windows in the adjoining breakfast area.



FORMERLY OPEN TO the entry hall, the dining room (ABOVE) is now a more intimate space. On each side of the fireplace, built-in contemporary hutches have gray glass inserts on doors and drawers. A Capiz shell chandelier highlights the custom table surrounded by updated wing chairs in heavy cotton chenille. In the living room (RIGHT), an acrylic-on-metal plate by Brian Hibbard has the number 7 “painted for good luck” on the horse’s blanket. New 9-foot-tall French doors lead to the entry hall. By reconfiguring the entry, Ferzoco created a corner of built-ins (FACING PAGE) for shoes and boots, pegs for clothing, and separate closets, not in view. The faux floor “rug” is inset stone bordered in black marble.

apartment as smart, young, and personable as its new owners while respecting its classic heritage. “They wanted more light and a new flow that would be communal, inviting, and sociable, rather than compartmentalized,” he says. “They wanted the living room to be his game room, with places for a billiard table and a recreational poker table, but with a sophisticated area for entertaining, too.”

At the same time, they wanted as much new storage as possible. “Matt has games and paraphernalia that had to go somewhere,” says Ferzoco. “We gave them lots of compatible new built-ins that keep everything organized, clean, and decluttered.”

A palette that is both exciting and soothing gives the apartment an almost magical sense of life. The couple’s favorite color is blue, which Ferzoco used as an accent, but eschewed the safer background of cream and beige in favor of gold, caramel, and gray for a neutral backdrop with a sense of spirit rather than understatement. Living room furnishings include kicky new window seats (with storage below), swivel chairs, and a custom double-width chaise covered in an eco-friendly bamboo fabric. In addition, four ottomans can be pulled in for strategic seating.

For the couple, the apartment is both fun and functional, an ideal place for them to have a balanced life. He usually plays poker three hours daily in a home office with a 10-foot-long desk big enough for several computer monitors. In her free time, she runs with the Boston Athletic Association and last spring won the Canada Marathon Championship. When he’s off, he works out, reads, and is a teaching fellow at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. Next on his agenda — probably in a year or so — is a new goal: earning a doctoral degree in clinical psychology. “Poker is challenging and stays interesting because it’s always changing,” he says. “I do pretty well because I work very hard at it. I’ll probably always enjoy playing, but at this point, psychology seems like more of a life’s work.” ■

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