

INSIDE: HEALTH & FITNESS SHOWCASE

Hunterdon Life

JUNE 2005

Back to the Center

**Christine Todd Whitman
leads a counterrevolution**

ALSO:

Restoring Hunterdon

Remembering the
Lambertville Music Circus

A LOFTY SPACE IN A SUBURBAN SETTING



1930's sideboard for storing art.

Glazed grape walls set home's "palette."

She's an accomplished artist; he's an award-winning composer. She yearns for a SoHo loft; he prefers a more suburban location.

They both got what they wanted in a home that celebrates their interests and accomplishments.

This 4,500 square foot, center hall Colonial underwent a dramatic transformation to become a home with large, open loft-like spaces with a sophisticated edge for entertaining. On the ground floor, the only walls in sight are those that surround the staircase, plus one between the dining room and the kitchen. The result is a flexible entertainment space that allows for large crowds and small gatherings and ample display of the clients' collection of art, personal accessories and mementos.

The foyer sets the stage for the balance of the home. Nothing remains of the original home. Everything you see, from the moldings to the whimsical, custom-designed wrought iron staircase, is new. Here, as well as elsewhere in the home, hollow core doors were replaced with triple light French doors with brushed nickel hardware. Acid-etched frosted glass inserts add light where needed. The foyer's lovely glazed grape walls were inspired by one of the wife's favorite paintings. It's a foretaste of the color scheme for the rest of the house: gentle shades of taupe and putty with accents of berry, lettuce green and sea glass blue. The sideboard, a piece from the 1930s, is the perfect repository for treasured art pieces. The floor is a series of 24" limestone squares set on the diagonal and delineated by bands of smaller stones. It continues from foyer to dining room, accentuating the openness of the spaces.

With an open plan, it's important to define the spaces. The usual solution is area rugs. But bare floors are more in keeping with the loft-like ambiance we wanted to achieve. So we opted for a more ➤

through the means to get to the ends.”

Birkner asked Rodgers how he got started with plastering. “A lot of it happened by accident,” Rodgers replied. “My grandfather was in the business and I was dragged out on weekends when I was eight years old, mostly to haul stuff up and down stairs.”

“After high school, I realized I didn’t have the aptitude for rocket science or brain surgery so, after a short stint as a carpenter, I went to work in this field,” he said. Rodgers works all over northern New Jersey – anyplace where there are turn-of-the-century homes including Short Hills, Montclair, Spring Lake and West Orange.

In 2001, Rodgers was hired by Port Authority to help restore the Old North Terminal at Newark Airport. “A lot of the plaster work was ruined when they moved the terminal,” said Rodgers. “They lifted it (the terminal building) from the concrete beams and had to chop the plaster away from them.”

The restoration project started on September 10, 2001. “I had just set everything up on the first day and on 9/11 came out for a cup of coffee before getting down to work. I looked up and saw a wisp of white smoke coming from the World Trade Center. Then I saw the second plane hit,” he said. “That kept us out of the terminal for 3 or 4 days.”

Rodgers has been applying plaster in Birkner’s home for over three months now. The results of his cornice and ceiling restoration are coming into focus in two large rooms, including the dining room he’s working on now. But Birkner doesn’t want to let Rodgers go. “I’m asking him (Rodgers) to stick around when he’s finished and maybe plaster our walls,” he said. “And do it the right way.”

After a few hours visiting the home, you begin to sense that there’s a relationship, on some level, between Rodgers’ and Birkner’s individual artistic paths. Birkner’s paintings meticulously capture life in a post-industrial world of decaying factories, drive-ins and gas stations, crumbling because they were built on the cheap with mass produced products. Rodgers’ art, on the other hand, transforms us to a pre-mass-produced age of hand-crafted design.

Then it hits you. Birkner doesn’t want his home to be a part of the world he’s painting about as his precise style seeks something more.

“There’s something solid and correct about plaster,” he said. ■

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The paintings on the wall are by the wife, who is a professional artist.

TERE BRESIN, ASID / PHOTOGRAPHER: DANIEL EIFERT

Recessed and accent lighting.



Sheer linen scrims at the windows allow for both light and privacy. The accompanying drapes feature quilted taupe fabric, nickel rods and industrial-size grommets.

Soft buff walls and floors finished to a natural tone provide a soft background for comfortable, flexible furniture in a variety of textures.