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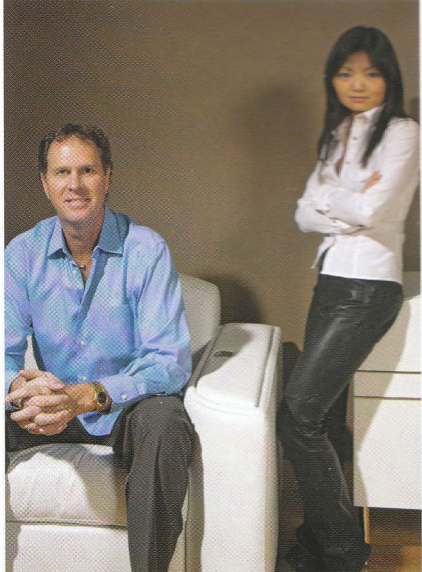
BREATHING ROOM

FENG SHUI-INSPIRED FURNITURE FREES UP SPACE IN A DOWNTOWN CONDO
BY SARA DASILVA PHOTOGRAPHY BY ED SOZINHO

Car payments. Waists. The national debt. Some things are definitely better small. But what about homes? In these times of a troubled economy and a fragile environment, modestly sized spaces are the clear choice for affordability and energy-efficiency. Still, those of us raised in ramblers can't help but wonder: Does small have to feel small? ■ In the fall of 2007, furniture designer Gary Roberts and orthodontist Yumi Abei found their answer in the new downtown 5th and Madison condominiums, whose green mandate dictates recycled building materials, low-flow fixtures and modest square footage; at 1,244 square feet, the floor plan the couple fell for is the largest on offer. Sold on the building's sustainable philosophy, clever architecture and spectacular water views, these Cleveland transplants traded in digs twice as big when they moved, but they've never looked back. "A smaller space is part of the downtown lifestyle," says Roberts. "It's a slight compromise for living in such a great location." ■ Their living/dining area—where they eat, relax, entertain and sometimes work—is only 398 square feet. Before you call it small, however, remember that 398 is just a number. It doesn't tell you what the room feels like. For that, you'd have to factor in the height of the sky, the harmonic effects of an ancient Chinese art and the design talents of Roberts, the award-winning creative force behind GBRoberts Functional Art. ■ Roberts' strategy for keeping finite square footage feeling spacious began with a little *feng shui*. While Roberts' style is frankly worldly—he's known for furniture simultaneously sleek and curvy, like hot-rod cars or pin-up girls—it turns out that the very curviness of his designs gives them *feng shui* credentials. Because *feng shui* teaches that the smooth flow of *chi*, or energy, throughout a room is essential to visual harmony, the lazy S-turns of Roberts' furniture form an

Roberts loves the look of a single vivid accessory. Here, a bright orange kettle sings against a creamy granite backsplash. Horsey art discovered at the Puyallup fair flanks a 44-square-foot office that pinch hits as guest quarters. Opposite page: The happy condo owners. Roberts is seated on his Monroe Club Chair featuring patent-pending asymmetry. There's one rounded arm and one flip-top, flat one for laptop lounging and stashing throws.





unseen riverbed along which energy flows. ■ If invisible vibrations aren't your cup of tea, credit the room's success to aesthetic discipline. Roberts' furniture pieces, most from a collection called Monroe after the famously voluptuous star, fit together like yin with yang, saving floor space and bestowing a sense of well ordered calm that engenders airiness. ■ Taking advantage of their 15th-floor unit's 10-and-a-half foot ceilings and north and west walls clad in glass, Roberts' next step was to annex the sky over Puget Sound. To create a heavenly color palette that blends with and brightens the Pacific Northwest grays outside, he chose sunshine-trapping reflective surfaces. It took six tries to find the perfect high-gloss white finish for the occasional tables, while polished chrome accents add sparkle to glass, wood and leather, an example of mixed media that is a Roberts' trademark. ■ In the end, Roberts has designed a place that could be called elegant or well edited, but never small. How does it feel? Standing here, Roberts says, "feels like standing on the bow of an ocean liner." +

■ INTERIOR DESIGN AND FURNITURE DESIGN: GARY B. ROBERTS, GBROBERTS FUNCTIONAL ART; 206.420.8139; GBROBERTS.COM; BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

■ FLUELESS ETHANOL FIREPLACES: ECOSMART FIRE, GARY ROBERTS, NORTHWEST DEALER; 206.420.8139; ECOSMARTFIRE.COM

■ COMPLETED: NOVEMBER 2007. AN AVAILABLE FLOOR PLAN AND FINISHES MEANT THAT ROBERTS AND ABEI COULD START DECORATING AS SOON AS THEIR SALE WAS FINAL



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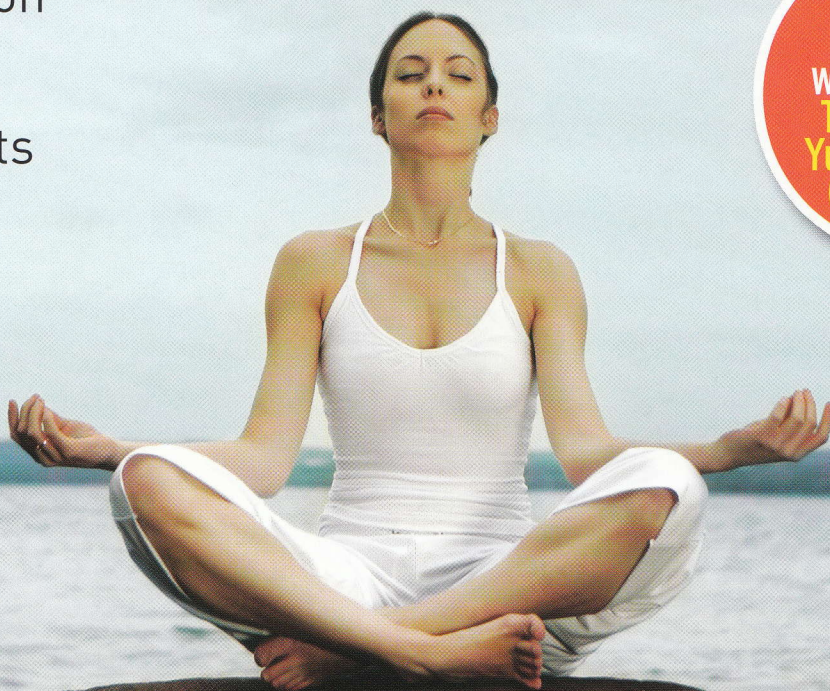
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