

Downsizing Without Losing the *Sense of Home*

By Myrna CG Mibus • Photos by Aaron Schomburg

Jean Wakely's kids were grown, she knew it was time to downsize from her spacious 4,200 foot Colonial home in Northfield, Minnesota. Yet, she was reluctant to make the transition unless she could find a space that was just right.

Then, the renovation of the Lockwood Opera House, originally built in 1872, caught Jean's attention. A group of developers were converting the building into four condominiums with retail space below. One of the units promised 2,200 square feet of living space on two levels, two bedrooms, two full baths, a large private office and a step-out patio with secluded courtyard. Jean loved it and decided she could make a transition to condominium living. She purchased the unfinished condominium in October 2005 and put her house on the market. ▶



View from the dining area to the living room. Note how the custom lighting highlights the original Lockwood Opera House tin ceiling.



Jean's favorite spot in the living room is the blue chair she calls her "command chair," a second-hand treasure she found in a Northfield shop called Present Perfect. From her cozy corner, Jean can oversee every part of her main floor living area – a plus when entertaining guests or just relaxing with her morning coffee.

She wanted her new home to be different from her traditional Colonial with its beige walls and muted decor. She wanted her condo to be warm and inviting with décor that embraced both her personality and the history of the building – but she didn't quite know where to begin.

Jean found her inspiration in a knick-knack shop in Poland. While visiting her daughter Andréa, who was an exchange student, the two went shopping and they discovered a piece of antique-looking cloth with bits of mirror sewn into a patchwork of warm, rich fabrics. Jean looked at the cloth and told Andréa, "I want our condo to look like that."

Back in Northfield, with cloth in hand, Jean connected with people in the community to help her home take shape. Her friend, Mariea Guthrie, a retired interior designer, suggested she call Dan Tarnoveanu, a painting designer specializing in old-world buildings. With Dan's help, Jean chose mystic gold paint for the walls and brick red for the trim.

Jean faced many challenges in the building process; the largest was that

the floor wasn't level because the 130 year old building was built on the dirt street instead of on a foundation. One of her greatest resources for solving them was "contractor extraordinaire," Scott Swanson. When Jean faced a challenge, like how to highlight the tin ceiling or build a stairway in an impossible space, "I would say to Scott, 'what if we do this?' and Scott would say, 'Well, we can do it one of three ways...here are your choices.' Well, now I can work with a guy like that!" Jean says.

Jean, Scott and a handful of local artisans installed maple and Brazilian wood floors throughout the lower level. They created a custom-made wood medallion at the foot of the stairs to lead up to a reading nook on the landing. They painted the bedrooms a robin's egg blue, installed tile in the upstairs bath and finished the main level office. In the kitchen they installed cork flooring, stainless appliances and floor to ceiling cabinets. The lower cabinets are custom-made with maple and black cherry woods and birch IKEA cabinets above. Jean



At the foot of the stairs is the birch and Brazilian cherry medallion, custom made by local artisan Cesar Strappazon.

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Jean's cozy reading nook at the top of the stairs.



called upon the talented Tracy Giza to paint her plain pantry doors to look like an old-world Chinese chest. Artist, Jennifer Wolcott, added decorative metalwork to the entry closet doors and created metalwork for the courtyard.▶



The kitchen has a cork floor and mixture of custom-made and IKEA cabinets. The cloth from Poland, the inspiration for the condo's decor, covers the multi-purpose bench under the table.



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The master bathroom's floors are covered in hard-wearing, commercial vinyl tile. The freestanding furniture pieces are from IKEA.



Her condo was ready to live in just as her Colonial sold. It was time for Jean to figure out what to move over from her larger home. "Although you'd love to bring your old furniture along," says Jean, "In a condo...everything has to do more than one thing." Jean carefully picked her furniture, went through her house and gave away items that she wasn't going to use. Then, in October of 2006, she packed her furniture; her downsized household and a few of her favorite things and moved in.

When friends walk into her new home they feel the warmth of Jean's personality in the furnishings and her decor. Bookshelves are filled with favorite books; walls are covered with an eclectic blend of artwork and family pictures. Jean's new living space is peaceful, yet ready to entertain. It embraces the best of the old world and the convenience of condo living.

And, if you look closely at the bench that doubles as a storage chest you might notice that it's draped with a lovely piece of cloth. It's the fabric from Poland, the inspiration that turned Jean's ordinary condominium into a home. 🏠



In the master bedroom, a custom designed headboard was built around an IKEA dresser and floor to ceiling windows bring in natural light.