

**At Home
Story &
Photography
By
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The valley-side of the Ruggiano home (right and bottom); nestled deep in the rocky hillside of the surrounding forest. Stella Ruggiano with J.R. (below) lounging in the living room.



One With Nature



Overhead, the trees form a green archway high above the twisting Chester County road. Their branches touch each other in a gently swaying handshake. All is silence except for happy birds in conversation and the lulling whir of the car tires.

Up a steep road, there's not a house in sight. Were the directions to the home of Louis and Stella Ruggiano correct? The circular driveway curves around a newly emerging rock garden and then...

Surely a higher power slipped this finely crafted structure down into a mile-high forest, disturbing nary a tree. Stretched along the top of the steep, rocky site, the home's cedar siding, also covering a connecting bridge and three-car garage, is painted the weathered, pinky taupe of the surrounding tree trunks. Contemporary windows with dark, charcoal gray frames are offset with a butter-vanilla colored trim.



Ms & Hers

ong hang



Two steps up into the dining room brings an entirely different, oriental flavor.

"Tom designed the table with the outside tower in mind," she explains. "The bleached-oak legs of the table follow its angled roof line. He also designed the matching buffet and had Bob Misko of West Chester build them."

The Far East theme is evident from the black, lacquered, high-backed chairs; smoky, charcoal-gray glass table top; contemporary chandelier; and the flower-butterfly-and-twig-patterned wall paper.

"I lucked out with the rug. I saw it in a shop window in Mexico, and bought it having no idea where I would ever use it. After Bob and his assistant assembled the table, I didn't like the glass and wood on the hardwood floor. I know they could have killed me but I prevailed on them to put this rug down underneath. It's gray, beige and black and it's perfect!"

She grins, rounding the wall into the gray and white kitchen. Three focal points highlight this shiny workplace: a free-form, center counter of deep-gray Corian with white speckles, a skylighted greenhouse over the corner sink and a pair of stained-glass, cupboard doors of white calla lilies with green leaves — hand-crafted by Carole Algier — centered in a wall of white, wood cabinets.

The circular breakfast room that flows from another corner of the kitchen is a



repeat of of the eight angles that form the stair tower. Seating around a white-iron, barrel-base table gives another spectacular view of the wooded slopes through three double-casement windows. The art deco wallpaper trim around the top of this room is in Stella's favorite colors, gray, taupe, rose and blue. On the common wall to the laundry are posters from Glasgow, Scotland, her home town.

With the sound of music drifting through the house from the strategically-placed stereo system, it's time to savor the master suite on the second floor. Crossing a balcony over the entrance hall and living room, Stella indicates one of three zone thermostats that control the temperature on each level, making it cool and comfortable on this impossibly-hot summer day.

In a cozy, Karastan-carpeted sitting room with a comfortable loveseat and



recliner for television viewing, Stella permits a peek into two, enormous, his-and-her, walk-in closets. "They're so large because I didn't want much furniture here in our bedroom," she remarks, looking contentedly around the adjoining, off-white, square — rare in this house— room. Furnished with only a king-sized bed with print coverlet, matching polished cotton, padded valances over the five windows and a graceful white, wicker chair, she adds, "Wouldn't it be ridiculous to spoil this view with curtains? It's like being in a tree house. This morning, I saw a bird flying by right on my level."

In the bathroom, gray Italian ceramic tiles lead up three steps to a luxurious sunken tub and whirlpool entirely filling the same eight-angled, round shape of the breakfast room below. Three double-casement windows provide light for assorted plants on the broad surrounding shelf. It's a place to soak, sun and survey! From the twin sinks on a wall-length, gray Formica vanity to the cedar sauna, separate water-closet room and steam shower, nothing has been omitted. Even the

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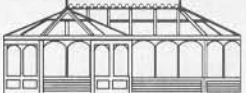
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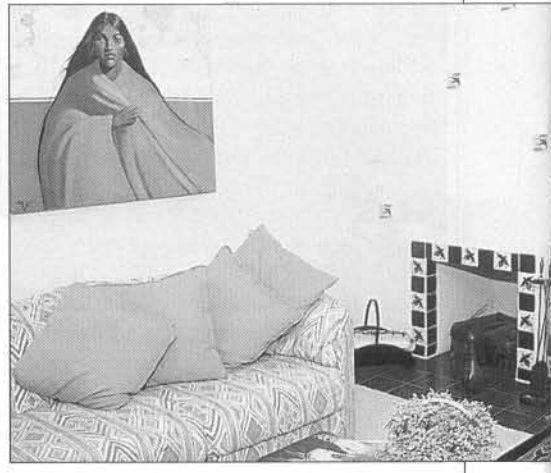
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bath towels rolled into two niches carry out Stella's jewel-tone color scheme.

She leads the way from this restful retreat, and it's time to check out the lower level where another angled hall opens into two guest rooms, bath and family room, a "mini" version of the living room above.

"This is our Mexican-Southwest room," Stella smiles. "Those hand-baked, cobalt blue and white tiles around the fireplace and those of terracotta and beige plastered randomly into the wall above, are from Mexico. We brought them home in a box with no idea where we were going to use them. I drove the tile man crazy. Neither one of us knew what we were doing," she laughs.

Hanging above an L-shaped sofa, which folds around a coffee table, is an acrylic portrait of a Mexican woman with long, jet-black hair, a blue shawl wrapped around her shoulders. "My husband, who is not an impulse buyer, saw it in a Puerto Valarta gallery and loved it," Stella says. "It's by Marta Gilbert and called 'El Serape Azul.' Riveting isn't it?"

While most of the lighting in the house is indirect, an exception in the entrance hall is the ten-sided crystal and verde-patina-on-brass chandelier created by Frederick Ramond.

"He also custom-made the taupe, ribbon-and-bow-design, metal, wall mirror and sconces in here," Stella says, opening the door to a sophisticated powder room. "Although I gravitate toward the blues, mauves and greens, I wanted the powder room to be different." Different it is, with black fixtures and a copper-colored floor, gold threads running through dark wallpaper and silver micro-mini, venetian blinds.

As Stella says "goodbye" from the gorgeous entrance hall, I now realize how human hands have directed the harmony between nature and man. No higher power crafted this house; the Ruggianos and their team have done the creating, making a home that does indeed fit with its environment. ♦

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