

Boston

# home

## MINOR UPGRADES, MAJOR IMPROVEMENTS

Local Design Pros Spill Their Cost-Saving Secrets \*

■ **who** to call, **what** to ask for, **where** to shop, and exactly **how much** you'll pay for a fresh new look

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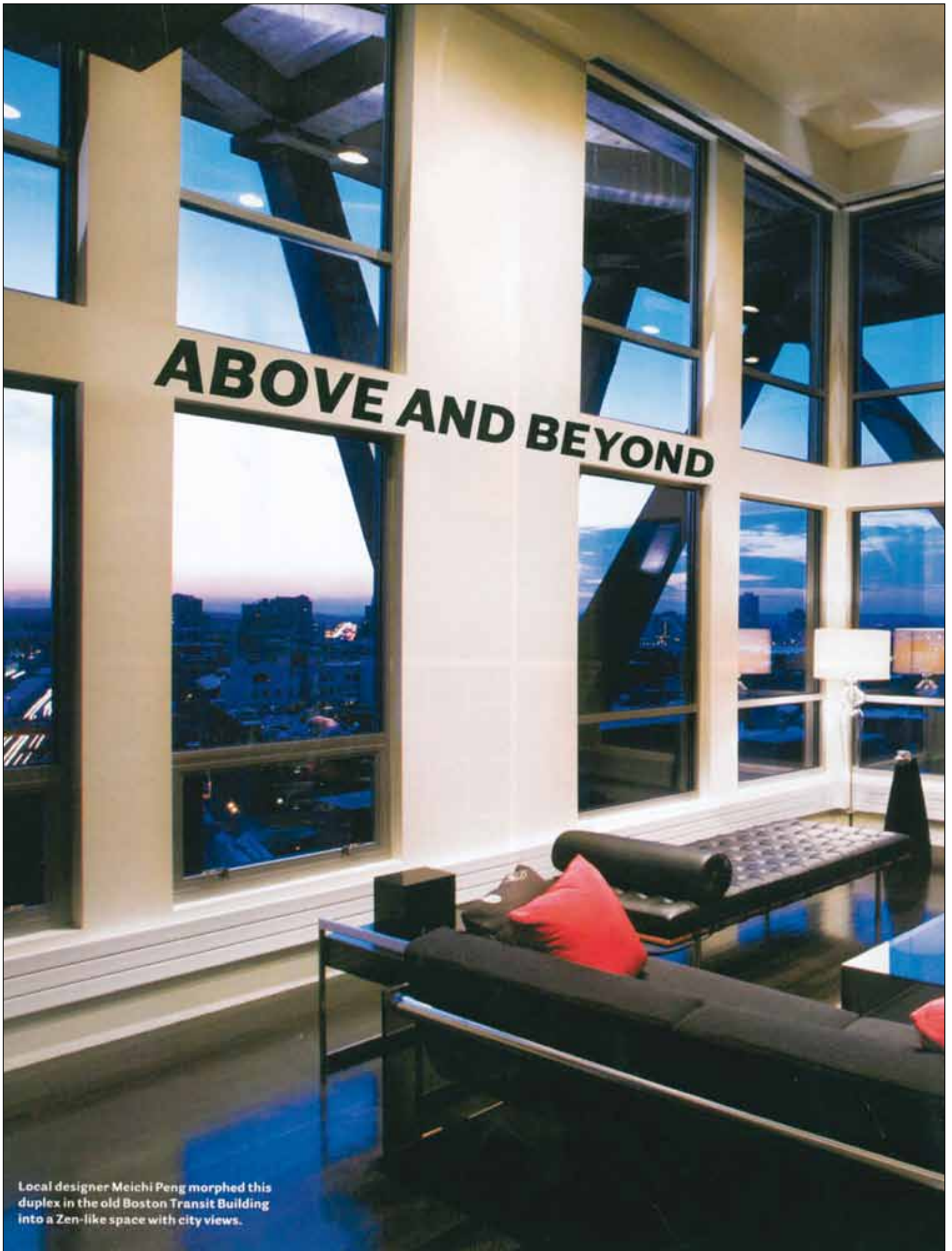
**BEFORE & AFTER:  
A SOUTH END  
CONDO GETS SMART**

**KID PORTRAITS  
AS THE NEW  
FAMILY PHOTO**

Spring 2009 (Display until 06.01.09)



■ ■ **Plus** Dust-Busters That Really Suck, Toxin-Free Wall Coverings, and How to Instantly Turn Your Yard into a Forest



# ABOVE AND BEYOND

Local designer Meichi Peng morphed this duplex in the old Boston Transit Building into a Zen-like space with city views.





BY RACHEL STRUTT

SOARING  
CEILINGS  
AND A  
MINIMALIST  
DESIGN  
LEND A  
COUPLE'S  
BACK BAY  
PENTHOUSE  
A STRIKING  
AESTHETIC.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KENT DAYTON

**IN MOST HOMES, GLEAMING SURFACES AND FLORAL ARRANGEMENTS ARE RESERVED FOR VISITING IN-LAWS AND COCKTAIL PARTIES; EVERYDAY LIFE IS MORE UNKEMPT.**

Yet Meichi Peng, the 34-year-old petite powerhouse of a designer who recently finished this Back Bay penthouse, reports that its owners are preternaturally tidy. To demonstrate, she opens up a bedroom closet: "Look how neat it is," she says playfully, pointing out the crisp, color-coded apparel. "Isn't it amazing?"

With a dark palette and sleek lines, the 3,000-square-foot duplex apartment is flawlessly detailed. Lighting is recessed and unobtrusive. Most fixtures are concealed. "We tried to hide all hardware to get a clean look," Peng explains. "I like a minimal style, something that is quiet and reflective," echoes one of the owners. "It's a Japanese aesthetic—open space over clutter. The Western aesthetic is more about filling up spaces."

The loft's square footage, with its nearly 18-foot-high ceilings, wooed the couple. The structure's history also held allure: Built in 1918 as the Boston Transit Building at Newbury Street and Massachusetts Avenue, it was retrofitted by architect Frank Gehry in 1987; he added two more stories and a dramatic parapet supported by oversize lead-coated copper struts. The building was then converted into condos in 2006. But it was the view, which includes Fenway Park to the west and the Charles River to the north, that sealed the deal; the vista is especially dazzling at night as cars on the Massachusetts Turnpike whiz by under Gehry's illuminated trusses.

Before purchasing the three-bedroom, three-bath condo, the owners requested that a wall in the bedroom be replaced with glass. At the time, Peng was an associate principal at ADD, the firm that created the interior standards for the developer, and she was eager to do the custom project. Delighted with its outcome, the owners asked Peng to complete their interiors just as she was launching her own design firm.

"Originally, I thought she'd help out more with furniture selection and placement," an owner recalls. "That's what I thought interior designers did. But she even designed the cabinetry and the console in our dining room. As we >>





worked together, the project grew bigger and bigger in scope."

One of Peng's most dramatic additions was a glass staircase that replaced the original stair. By attaching steps to a central spine and installing a glass banister, Peng created a strong architectural element. She clad the adjacent wall in Inca gray slate—a rough surface that makes a lovely foil for the sleek glass. Another stunning feature: a two-story bookcase for the owners' growing collection of art books. "We wanted to accentuate the verticality of the space," Peng says.

The minimalist restraint of the interiors and the carefully chosen lighting make a striking backdrop for the owners' art collection, which includes '60s fashion photographs by Herb Ritts; contemporary paintings, including several by Brazilian José Gonçalves; and African tribal wood sculptures. The wooden African art in particular imbues the condo with warmth and personality. The residents are quick to point out that the elongated geometric forms found in tribal art were a major influence on 20th-century modernism—Picasso's Iberian art-inspired painting, *Les Femmes d'Alger*, of women with highly geometric faces, is perhaps the most famous example.

"My collection is small, because I want to have proper space between the art," says an owner. "I always feel less is more." In the home's soaring living room, a Mies van der Rohe Barcelona chair and day bed are at home in their minimalist habitat. Just like the tribal sculptures, the iconic pieces have plenty of breathing room. And in this urban aerie, the space in between may be the most winning feature of all. ■



**INTERIORS** Meichi Peng, Boston  
**CONTRACTOR** B&D Building & Remodeling

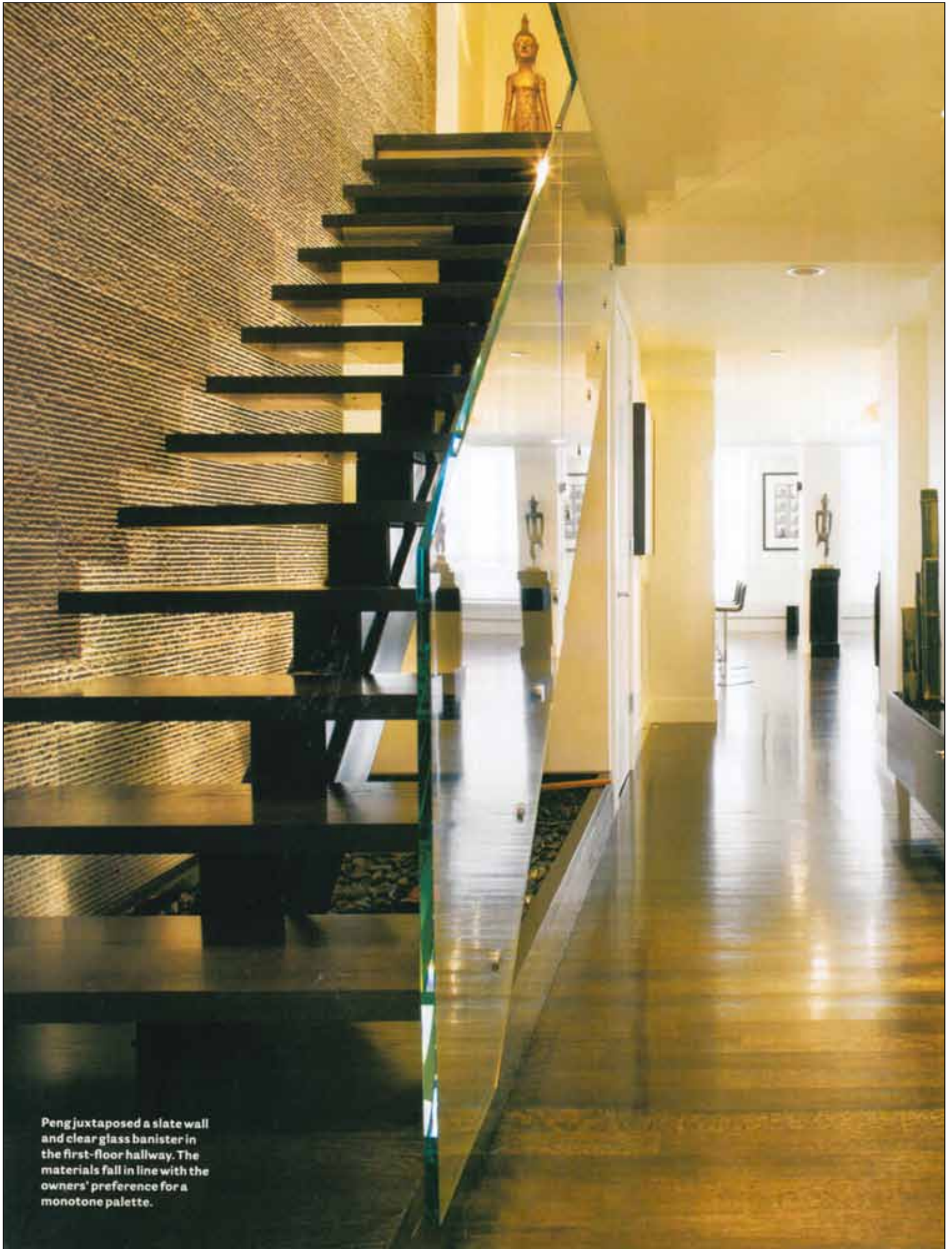




Above, in the kitchen, black granite countertops and a basaltina backsplash are paired with white lacquered cabinets. Below, the dining room's black and white photographs and a Peng-designed cantilevered sideboard.







Peng juxtaposed a slate wall and clear glass banister in the first-floor hallway. The materials fall in line with the owners' preference for a monotone palette.

