

The keeping room combines the function of a dining and sitting area. "The kitchen space needs to be good for guests and for baby Mercer's breakfast," says interior decorator Fran Kennan, who is also mother to three little ones. "That's why the banquette is upholstered in vinyl. You can clean it with 409." Keeping the home open to the view of downtown was a priority. The Margjekas entertain frequently, and guests are drawn to this built-in feature of the home.



KMAC Greenworks installed the reclaimed wood ceiling in the kitchen. Armand was instrumental in the design. A look up reveals workman's boots footprints. Fran installed the mouldings. Color? Ombre by Pratt & Lambert

Text by LUCY MERRILL Photography by JEAN ALLSOPP

# NO RULES

## Condo Design Colors Outside the Lines



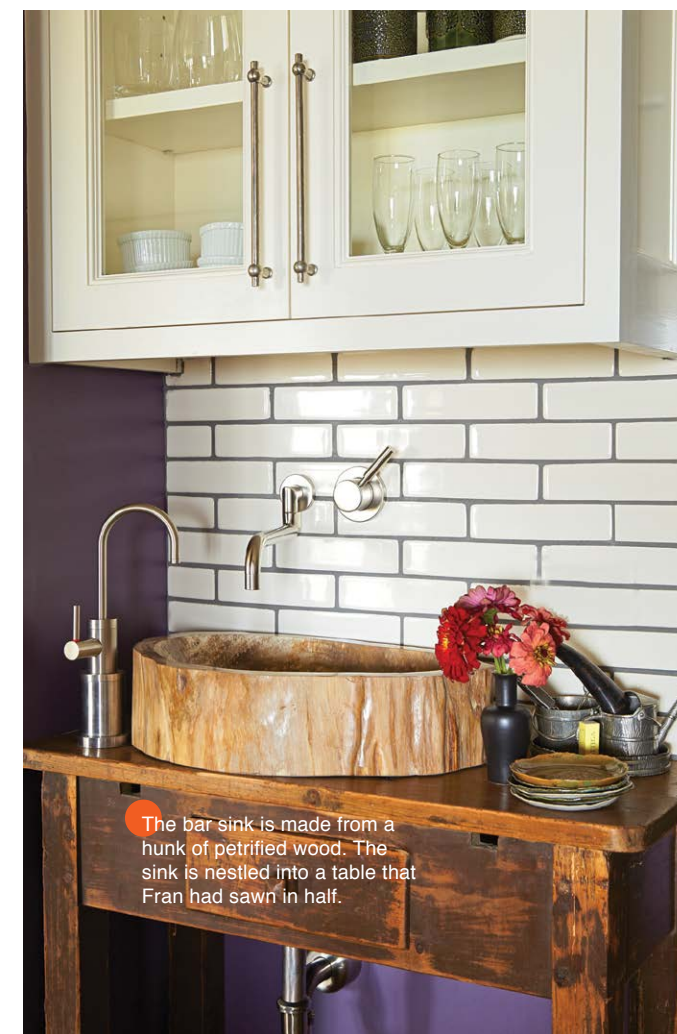
Meg and Armand Margjeka look at home through the unique lens of their experiences.





Fran had to enlist the use of a crane to lift this 19th-century steel French armoire up to the Margjeka's condo. It wouldn't fit in any of the elevators.

The Listening Room is a space dedicated to the appreciation of music and conversation, made homey with layered oriental rugs from Paige Albright. Music machines—a CD player and a record player—are in the 19th-century French armoire made of blackened steel. RIGHT: The kitchen is a blend of vintage and high-tech elements. Industrial light fixtures from South of Market in Atlanta illuminate an island created from an old-fashioned shop counter, complete with numbered drawers, that has been topped with zinc, a surface that is not inanimate, but is always changing as it reacts to its environment.



The bar sink is made from a hunk of petrified wood. The sink is nestled into a table that Fran had sawn in half.

**MEG AND ARMAND MARGJEKA ARE NOT WHITE PICKET FENCE PEOPLE.** Marriage and even a new baby couldn't put them in a suburban bungalow. Instead, they have made a home for their young family in a Highland Park condo with a remarkable interior tailored to their personalities.

"Meg and Armand are creative people who know what they want," says interior decorator Fran Keenan, who helped make the condo into a place where the proverbial different drummer was right at home.

Although Meg has a degree in business, the businesses she has pursued call for creativity and an eye for design. Living in Los Angeles, she and a friend launched a line of cosmetics for teens, which took her all over, even to an appearance on QVC in London.

"We considered it our business school," Meg says. Graduation day came when Meg decided it was time to return home to Birmingham. She took a job at Etc, a jewelry and accessory store in Mountain Brook Village. Owner Judy Abroms was looking toward retirement, so

Meg was presented with a business opportunity that she has embraced with new lines and a larger storefront in Mountain Brook Village.

Armand, an artist and musician from Albania, has studied sculpture, painting, and drawing, but is currently concentrating on the music business. He has a newly released album, "Margo, Margo," and owns Pipe and Gun Studio in Homewood, a creative space where musicians from across the country record, produce, write, collaborate, and just hang out.

In keeping with the couple's non-traditional approach to



*“We love the floors. They are reclaimed wood and there’s an amazing herringbone pattern. It reminds me of an old Parisian apartment.”* —Meg Margiecka



The gallery is dominated by Meg's piano, which she played during the 17 years she studied classical piano. Now it is usually Armand who sits down at the keyboard. The art wall that gives the room its name is a space for "fluid art," meaning that the work on display here will change. The French doors leading from the entry to the gallery are new, but have the look and feel of antiques. Fran showed the artisans who crafted and finished them the look she wanted and they made the new doors seem to have been well used. "It's authentic down to the feel," she says. The large sconces on either side of the doors were crafted from antique mirrors.





paint color:  
Wendigo,  
Pratt & Lambert

Baby Mercer's room is a nursery to nurture an artistic seedling. The near-black walls set off the room's focus, a large painting by Amy Pleasant titled "The Arrival," a piece that spoke to Meg because she was expecting Mercer's arrival. The master bedroom's focus is the custom wood bed crafted by Jeremy Darnell. The concrete side tables (and the concrete chair adjacent to the bar in the entry) are original designs by Jan Jander. The linens are layers of subtle patterns and texture.

life, they had not one wedding, but two. The first took place in Arkansas, where Armand attended college.

"We had our wedding lunch at Chili's," Meg says.

The casual nuptials came about because international red tape had snarled their plans for a wedding in Italy. Undeterred, the couple held the Italian wedding a year later just after learning that their son, Mercer, was on the way.

"He came to our wedding in Italy," Meg says. Mercer's advent also spurred the couple to buy and renovate the condo. "We changed everything to suit us," Meg says. "I love everything casual. Armand is relaxed and he has helped me be less uptight."

The first goal was to give the home an open feel, with a flow from room to room that is not interrupted with doors.

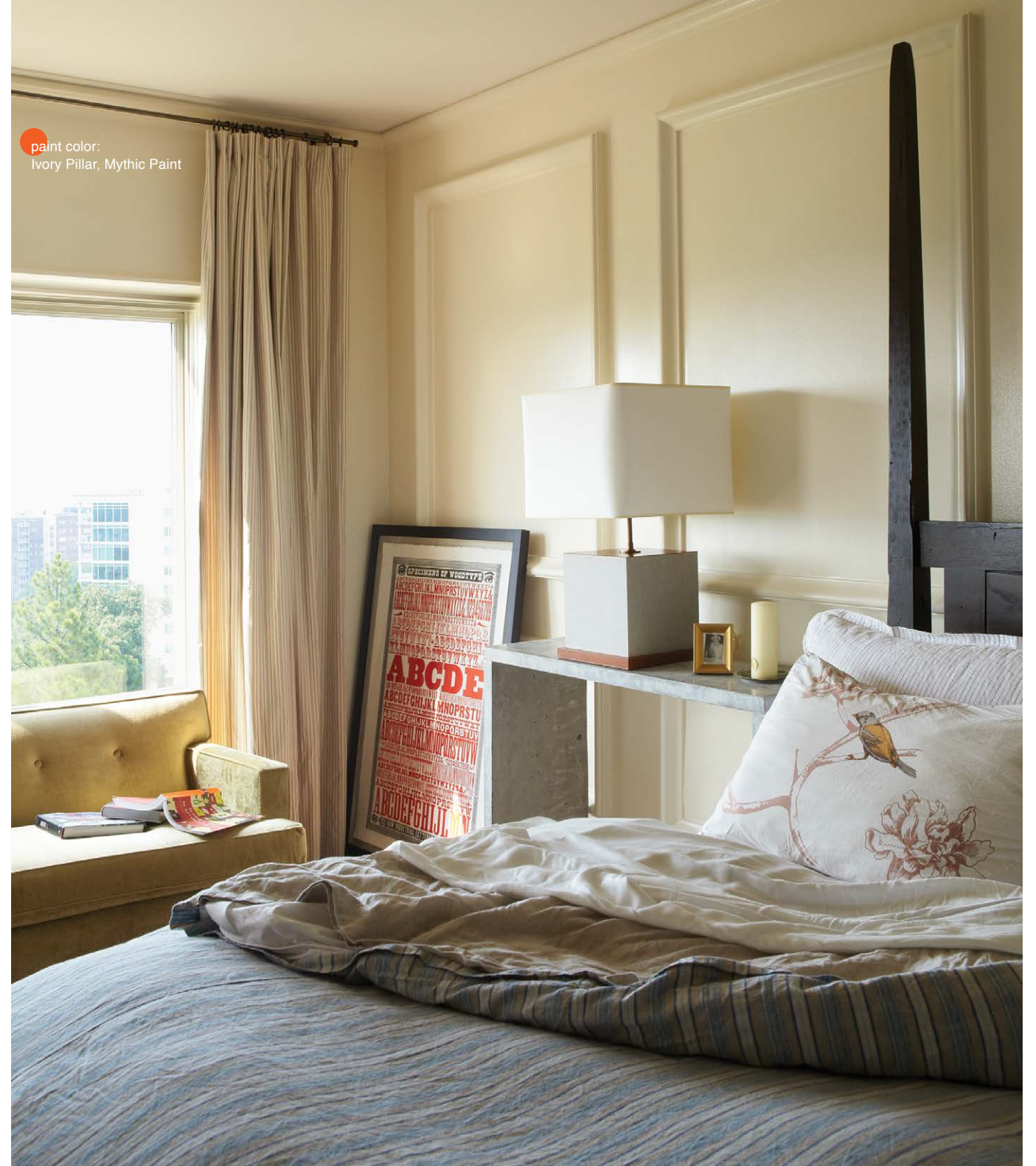
"Albanians have more communal spaces," Meg says. "So we wanted open space, with not a lot of doors and one room flowing into the others. Fran helped us catch that vibe."

The rooms are specially suited to the Margjekas' lifestyle. Instead of the usual living room, dining room and den, their home has an entry, gallery, listening room, and TV room.

"You walk into a round entry room, where all the doors are hidden (they open with touch latches) except for the French doors that open to the gallery," Meg says.

The gallery is an airy space with a recessed concrete "art wall" illuminated by LED lighting. The herringbone patterned floors push toward The Listening Room, where the couple enjoys the music that is an important part of their life. Adding depth are oriental rugs layered for a unique look that arose from Armand's childhood.

"When Armand grew up, his home was wall to wall rugs," Meg says. "His mother made them and he remembers the hum of the machine and layers of rugs to sit on. We love this room. We can have a glass of wine, look at the view, and talk or listen to music."



paint color:  
Ivory Pillar, Mythic Paint

**resources:** interior design: **FRAN KEENAN DESIGN** 205.821.8183 architect: **JOHN HUDSON, HUDSON ARCHITECTURE** 205.637.7568 contractor: **STRUCTURES INC.** Erica Neel / "Will Kinnebrew, project manager • 205.663.4252 • www.structureshomes.com flooring: **KMAC GREENWORKS** 2850 35th Avenue North, Birmingham, Alabama • www.kmacgreenworks.com woodwork: **AARON LANE, LANE WOODWORKING** 205.337.2811 concrete sidetables and chair in entry: **JAN JANDER ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN, LLC** 205.218.3510 • www.janjanderad.com metalwork: **MANUEL HERNANDEZ, HERNANDEZ FORGING** 205.655.4766 entry: Italian light fixture: **CIRCA INTERIORS AND ANTIQUES** 2831 Culver Road, Birmingham, Alabama • 205.868.9199 listening room: rugs: **PAIGE ALBRIGHT ORIENTALS** 2814 Petticoat Lane, Birmingham, Alabama • www.paigealbrightorientals.com armoire: **1ST DIBS, NEW YORK** www.1stdibs.com kitchen/keeping room: appliances: **ALLSOUTH APPLIANCE** 4 W. Oxmoor Road, Birmingham, Alabama • 205.942.0408 • www.allsouthappliance.net banquette: **MARK JORDAN, MARK V. JORDAN UPHOLSTERY** 334.279.0056 chandelier: **FRENCH MARKET ANTIQUES, INTERIORS MARKET**, Pepper Place, Birmingham, Alabama • 205.323.4700 bergere chairs: **ROBUCK AND COMPANY ANTIQUES** 425 Peachtree Hills Ave NE • www.robuckandcompany.com bar sink: **TRITON STONE** 205.592.0202 • tritonstone.com nursery: painting: **AMY PLEASANT** amypeasant.com custom changing table: **MANUEL HERNANDEZ, HERNANDEZ FORGING** 205.655.4766 oval crib: **STOKKE** www.stokke.com bubble chandelier: **LIZA SHERMAN, NEW YORK** www.lizashermanantiques.com master suite: bed: **JEREMY DARNELL** 205.613.0538 linens: **SUITE DREAMS** 2409 Montevallo Road, Birmingham, Alabama • 205.414.1922 hardware: **BRANDINO BRASS** www.brandinobrass.com



**paint color:**  
A custom metallic mix by finisher Daniel Whitsett coats the domed ceiling in the TV room.



**“Working in fashion first taught me the language of fabrics and color.”** —Fran Keenan

## Meet Fran Keenan

Fran Keenan of Fran Keenan Design, like so many, set out in one direction for a career and along the way found that she had strayed onto a different path. With a degree in fashion design from the University of Alabama, she jetted for New York and career in fashion design with Polo and Tommy Hilfiger. Later she worked for the ultra-creative design duo, Diamond Baratta Design. “It opened my eyes to a new level of creativity,” says Fran. “I’ve never looked at a room the same way since.” That new focus brought her to Birmingham, where she became decorating editor of Cottage Living magazine. “That’s where I fell in love with the idea of functional, beautiful living,” says Fran. With the birth of her second child, she decided to go the work-from-home route and started her own design business.

“I help a client flesh out how they really want to live. Our homes and surroundings truly shape us,” says Fran.

Fran’s daily joy is in her Homewood home, with husband, Matt, an attorney, and daughters Ella, 7, Harper, 4, and baby son Wilkes.



As in any home, the Margjekas’ kitchen is central to family life, and they made it to order. “We knocked out everything and created a blank canvas,” Meg says. She and Armand enjoy cooking together, so the kitchen boasts an eight-burner Wolf range and two ovens. Concrete countertops and a zinc-topped island provide workspace with style.

At the opposite end of the workspace is the keeping room, painted a rich eggplant, featuring a farm table and a custom banquette that runs the length of the room, and red bergere chairs, “two of my favorite chairs I have ever bought,” says Fran.

“We wanted a bistro feel where we hang out,” Meg says. “You can have meals at one end and read at the other end. There is a fireplace too. We can’t wait to use it.”

Contemporary art, traditional rugs, antiques, industrial artifacts, concrete walls, reclaimed oak flooring, a flat screen television, and a turntable with vinyl records—the mix of elements may sound like a baffling aggregation, but it has been put together with confidence from elements the Margjekas love. It makes for a striking and personal interior.

As Meg says, “We wanted to stay true to who we are.”



## around the house

**1** A pair of red velvet armchairs brings even more punch to the keeping room. The bookshelf, an original recess, received an update with cleaner lines. **2** The guest bath continues the wood and concrete theme with its concrete bowl sink atop an antique farm table. The walls provide a contrast with metallic wallpaper in a 1960s David Hicks pattern. **3** The kitchen island is crafted from a hardware store cabinet with new fixtures by Brandino Brass. The Margjeka’s use the drawers for linens and utensils. Its narrow size accommodated the small width of the kitchen. **4** The condo’s rotunda entry greets guests with a star design in the white oak flooring that radiates into the gallery as a herringbone pattern. The metallic floral wallpaper is from Studio Printworks. **5** Chalkboard paint in the hallway leading to baby Mercer’s room calls for playful, daily doodles and sayings. **6** Hooks on the kitchen island hold pots and pans. **7** A stocked bar in the gallery welcomes guests. **8** French doors leading from the entry to the gallery are new, but have the look and feel of antiques.

