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The living room's soaring windows offer a view across the western part of Dallas.

Photos by Andy Jacobsohn/Staff Photographer

**HOME**

## Living the high life

Couple merges traditional and uncommon decor in a penthouse residence

By **NANCY BALDWIN**  
Special Contributor

When Laree Hulshoff became engaged to Ben Fischer, it was an easy decision to move to his hometown of Dallas.

Moving from Buffalo, N.Y., was one thing. Merging two households into a penthouse condominium was quite another.

"I had a condo on the waterfront which I hated to leave," she says. Yet leave it she did, knowing that in departing Buffalo she was starting a new life in Texas.

Once together in Dallas, the couple shopped for a new residence to call their own. Fischer, an investment director and portfolio manager with a downtown office, had been living at the Rienzi at Turtle Creek. "The whole area is pretty cool," he says.

Together they chose a penthouse at the Plaza at Turtle Creek II as their new home, both for its unobstructed view of western Dallas and its two-story floor plan. "It's so open and airy, not constrained like other apartments," Fischer says.

The building is part of Rosewood Hotels & Resorts, which owns the Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek.

The space was a blank canvas, unfinished with few walls and no build-out. "It was a shell," says Hulshoff, a retired investment management consultant. "It became ours to do."

As exciting as that was, the two knew they faced a challenge. "We both like art, so we had to find a place to put it," Hulshoff says. Fischer needed space for his collection of Texas-themed prints. Hulshoff, a collector of original wall decor by Buffalo artists, needed a



View from above: Chairs flank a plant.



Wood walls grace the office, which Ben Fischer wanted to feel like a men's club.



A 175-pound chandelier made of glass reclaimed from kilns in Portugal required that the ceiling be reinforced with steel.

place to display her pieces. "We did a little wall moving," she says.

The art collections were only a part of the challenge. An avid traveler, Hulshoff had amassed an extensive assortment of global artifacts. These also had to be incorporated into the new home.

"She has more of an affinity for Asian art than I do," Fischer says. "I'm much more traditional."

To help allocate space and design the interior, the couple called on Rick Rozas, owner of Rick Rozas Design, and Alice Cottrell, of Alice Cottrell Interior Design.

"It was a really, really different challenge," Rozas says.

New to high-rise living, Hulshoff and Fischer relied on Rozas to guide them through the ins and outs of completing their residence.

"The restrictions are a lot greater," Fischer says. For instance, because of the close proximity of neighbors, construction could only occur between 8:30 a.m. and 4 p.m. Delivery had to be scheduled a few days in advance.

Another challenge, Rozas says, was the fact that no plumbing could be moved.

"It's like trying to repair a street when people are driving on it," Fischer says.

Yet, Hulshoff and Fischer saw the potential in the space and had few firm requirements. "There was no preconception," Hulshoff says. "We knew we wanted wooden floors. We knew we needed an office."

"I just wanted a lot of closet space," Fischer says. "She wanted a great kitchen."

As planning began, Hulshoff's flexibility led to some difficult moments in the first few months. "Laree's vision was never really clear," Rozas says. "We were never really on the same page."

"Rick kept taking me to other condos. Some of the things I wanted to do were pretty wild," Hulshoff says.

The turning point came

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**DMA**

## Pitman resigning

Director's efforts have boosted museum to new heights

By **SCOTT CANTRELL**  
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Bonnie Pitman, whose innovative initiatives as Eugene McDermott director of the Dallas Museum of Art have drawn international attention, will step down in May for health reasons.

She is being treated for a protracted respiratory infection, but will continue to work with the museum through April 2012 on special projects and help with the search for and transition to a new director.

Because she was undergoing treatment Friday, she was unavailable for comment.

"I've been worried about her and her health," said Deedie Rose, chairwoman of the DMA's board of trustees. "We just want her to get fully well, so that we can celebrate what she's done."

"We've never had a better leader, and I doubt we'll ever have one that is better."

This will be the highest-profile change on the area's art-museum scene, which in the last two years has seen new directors at the Nasher Sculpture Center, Kimbell Art Museum and Amon Carter Museum.

Olivier Meslay, who holds the dual titles of senior curator of European and American art and Barbara Thomas Lemmon Curator of European art, will serve as interim director. Rose said a search committee will be formed soon.

Pitman came to the DMA in 2000 as deputy director and succeeded John R. "Jack" Lane in the top job in 2008. With a particular interest in education and audience involvement, she led a multi-year survey of visitors to the museum, which prompted new approaches to programming and

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Visit Films

Austin Vickers as Moss and Sarah Hagan as Jess star in Clay Jeter's *Jess + Moss*, which won for best narrative feature.

**DALLAS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL**

## 'Jess' gets best narrative

'Elevate' also wins top Target award, \$25,000 prize

By **CHRIS VOGNAR**  
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The Dallas International Film Festival announced its award winners Friday, which means some filmmakers will go home with fat wallets as well as fond memories.

*Jess + Moss*, Clay Jeter's movie about the bond shared by a pair of second cousins from rural Kentucky, captured the \$25,000 Target Filmmaker Award for Best Narrative Feature. *Elevate*, Anne Buford's documentary about the Senegalese SEEDS Academy for basketball, won the \$25,000 Target Filmmaker Award for Best Documentary Feature.

*Wuss*, directed by Richardson's Clay Liford, received a Special Jury Prize for narrative feature.

The narrative jury also named two honorable mentions: Goh Nakamura's performance in *Surrogate Valentine* and Darragh Byrne's *Parked*. *Norman Mailer: The American* received an honorable mention from the documentary jury.

*Five Time Champion*, a small-town Texas drama directed by Richardson's Berndt Mader,

See **'WUSS'** Page 3E

# Penthouse merges styles



**Ben Fischer** took a particular interest in the light fixtures. These are in the master bedroom's lavatory.

Continued from Page 1E

when Rozas selected several types of wood for Hulshoff to review, including a burning bush crotch mahogany. "Once she saw that, it all just changed," Rozas says. The selection of different woods for the kitchen, office and bathrooms solidified the design

direction for the interior.

Cottrell and Rozas were able to create an interior as diverse as Fischer and Hulshoff's tastes in decor.

"When Laree moved in, she brought all her things," Cottrell notes. "She likes so many things. It was hard to mesh it all together."

"She was rocking Ben's



Photos by Andy Jacobsohn/Staff Photographer

**The kitchen cabinets** are redwood burl with copper hardware from Argentina. The vent hood's motor is hidden in the ceiling to muffle the sounds.

world with all this new stuff," Rozas says.

"The project went from a really small thing to really, really huge," he continues. "Every room is different. She loves material; she loves wood; she loves color; she loves art." Beginning with the kitchen, each room was designed to be beautiful and functional.

Kitchen cabinets are redwood burl with copper hardware from Argentina. A black stainless-steel ventilation hood is framed into the structure of the building, its motors hidden in the ceiling above the office to reduce noise. "It's bulletproof," Rozas says. The industrial sink disposal "would chew up a human," Hulshoff says. "It's the most functionally designed kitchen I've ever had."

Wood walls grace the couple's office. Fischer wanted it to feel like a men's club. To achieve



**Beginning with the kitchen**, each room was designed to be beautiful and functional.

the look of raised wood panels, Cottrell and Rozas chose bubinga wood with makore edging and ebony trim to accent the walls. A Swarovski crystal chandelier hangs from the ceiling above an animal-skin rug on the floor.

Another of Fischer's chandeliers hangs above the tub in the master bath. Crafted of excess glass reclaimed from kilns in Portugal, the round chandelier weighs 175 pounds and required that the ceiling be reinforced with steel. Cabinets

in the bath are burning bush crotch mahogany and the floor is black limestone, also chosen by Fischer.

Perhaps the most colorful room is the living area. Leaving Hulshoff to select the paint and upholstery took a leap of faith, Fischer says. "I just closed my eyes and prayed."

One wall is devoted to Fischer's Hill Country prints; another is adorned with golden Chinese temple carvings and a framed Indian wedding sari.

"I think everybody should go through this process. You see what the other person is seeing through their eyes," Hulshoff says. "I have very eclectic tastes. Ben is very conservative. Somehow we brought the two together."

*Nancy Baldwin is a Plano freelance writer.*

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