

Welcome to Our Nest

Please leave all ideas about what a family home should look like at the door.

By **ESTELLE BOND GURALNICK**
Photographs by **ERIC ROTH**

On a recent rainy afternoon, Negin Ewald and her young daughter and son baked and frosted two dozen cupcakes that the children arranged on a tray and delivered as a surprise treat to their nearest neighbors. Welcome to Mister Rogers's neighborhood, by way of the Ritz-Carlton Towers, where Negin and Oliver Ewald and their offspring are happily ensconced in their carefully planned high-style 22d-floor apartment with sweeping views of Boston.

"I absolutely love living here," says 38-year-old Negin (pronounced Ne-geen), who's a self-professed city person. "For us, it's like having a vertical neighborhood. There's such diversity, from empty nesters to couples and singles, even students, and everyone is so friendly. Right on our floor, there are neighbors we really enjoy. Of course, with kids, it's especially easy to meet everyone, because people always start a conversation, on the elevator, at The Sports Club, everywhere."



VERTICAL NEIGHBORHOOD The Ewalds' living room (facing page) is furnished sparsely, with pairs of large-scale soft-edged sofas and chic vintage chairs re-covered in classic pony hide taking center stage. In the media area, modular Italian pieces covered in tightly-woven polyester fabric in an elephant-gray tone stack in different configurations, while the innovative steel "clip tables" add whimsy and function by sliding on and off the upholstery.



The Ewalds were married after earning master's degrees from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, where they met. In a class of several hundred students, they were serendipitously assigned to the same five-person team. "It was definitely *not* love at first sight," says Negin, "because we have very different learning styles. Oliver has an uncluttered mind, very focused on facts, while I'm more apt to say, 'Let's see how one facet impacts another.' But, in time, we came to realize how much we had in common."

As they learned of each other's international backgrounds, a friendship blossomed. Though Oliver grew up speaking German at home, he was born in Beirut and subsequently lived in Korea, Japan, and San Francisco. Negin was born in Tehran, moved to London at the age of 8, then to Texas. If they'd had their first choices after graduation, newlywed life would have been in San Francisco (Oliver) or Manhattan (Negin), but good job offers for both of them came instead from Boston, which they now consider home.

In 2001, with their newborn daughter, Leyla, the Ewalds left their three-story Back Bay walk-up for the then new Ritz Towers, thinking of it as an exciting interlude. "We always had plans for a second child and always had our eyes on the suburbs, but we weren't ready then," recalls Negin (who, it turns out, still isn't ready). After the birth of their son, Max, in 2002, they spent many weekends reading real estate ads and touring open houses, and even saw one home in West Newton that appealed to them both. "Oliver was ready to shovel snow and live the suburban life, but I remained reluctant," Negin says. "I like the convenience and the buzz of city life. I like being in the middle of things."

The more Negin dragged her feet, the more enticing a nearby alternative became. Down the hall from their condo was a furnished model apartment, never occupied, much larger than their own place, with the added advantage of more windows and natural light. Could its generic contours be altered to suit a young family and withstand the wear and tear that comes with little feet? For the answer, friends referred them to architect David Stern and interior designer Diane McCafferty, whose eponymous South End firm supplied the solution, and in doing so proved that child-oriented permissiveness had finally bitten the dust.

McCafferty describes the Ewalds' aesthetic as forward-thinking—where Bauhaus-inspired vintage modern pieces meet fresh Italian contemporary looks. With Mc-

GOT KIDS, STILL COOL The family room (above), which is next to the kitchen, has an Italian coffee table on wheels that rolls out of the way when the sofa is opened for guests. Negin Ewald (shown below with Leyla and Max) loves that the marble-topped table in the dining area (facing page) sponges clean. The table was designed by Diane McCafferty. "It's much more practical for family living than a wood surface," says McCafferty. Chairs are vintage Mies van der Rohe.



THE COOLEST PLAYROOM EVER A partial-height wall covered in chalkboard paint separates Leyla's bedroom from the central play space and Max's room, which is similarly configured. Facing page, from left: The master bedroom is all about the 22d-floor view; Max takes a spin around the unit on his scooter.



Architecture and Design

STERN MCCAFFERTY

David Stern and Diane McCafferty
46 Waltham Street, Suite 4A, Boston,
617-338-1125,
sternmccafferty.com



Cafferty's knowledge of durable materials and her equally keen eye, she's managed to create a space that merges modern design with the Ewalds' practical lifestyle needs. And the Ewalds, ignoring ideas about what a family home *should* look like, are an inspiration, demonstrating that you don't have to be childless to be chic. "To entertain and be comfortable at home with kids means uncluttered beauty in furniture and fabrics," says McCafferty. "It's all about simplicity and safety while staying sophisticated."

Both Stern and McCafferty consider the Ewalds "the perfect pair as clients, clear and decisive about all the particulars, from the structural to the aesthetic." Says Stern: "This project was never meant to be a gut job. Since the space hadn't been lived in, materials were in good shape, though not necessarily our first choice." But no one wanted to be wasteful, so they kept the existing flooring and kitchen cabinets – now updated with new hardware – and even left the master bathroom intact.

What did happen was both budget friendly and space enhancing. Stern widened the doorways from the entry hall to the living room and from there to the kitchen, immediately establishing a more open, gracious flow. Then he transformed a library and a bedroom into the children's domain, centered by a common play area with separate bedrooms for Leyla, now 7, and Max, 5, as bookends. To create a private media area in the vast living/dining room, he designed – at McCafferty's request – a layered, floating wood divider panel suspended on stainless-steel stanchions that conceals all the media wiring. At the apartment's secondary entrance, there's now a mudroom with built-ins for family gear and outerwear.

In deference to the view, low, oversize geometric pieces define both living and dining areas. Twin tailored sofas are tightly upholstered in closely-woven dark brown wool for a grounding element that's durable and handsome. Large-scale coffee tables (48 inches square) made of highly polished mirrored steel with glass tops provide both storage and display areas. Vintage steel chairs with new pony-hide covers add whimsy and pattern, while the large custom marble dining table with chrome legs sponges clean. Modular Italian pieces in the sequestered media area stack in different configurations and can be moved around the corner. Innovative steel "clip tables" powder-painted orange, McCafferty's design, slide on or off the upholstery. There isn't a vulnerable wood surface to be seen.

For Negin, city life continues to be replete with advantages. "I think the kids get a lot out of living here," she says. "We walk to different places, like Beacon Hill or the Aquarium. There's always something interesting going on at Boston Common. And they love taking the T to the Science Museum. It's a good way of life for them – and for us, too." ■

Estelle Bond Guralnick is a frequent contributor to the Globe Magazine. Send comments to magazine@globe.com.



Childproof Chic

Negin Ewald says that when she was growing up, children didn't use the living room – in strong contrast to today's embrace of open, interactive family living. For tips on how to live stylishly with children in tow, we turned to designer Diane McCafferty, who is herself the mother of a 4-year-old. McCafferty suggests you:

➤ Look for pieces covered in high-quality vinyls that are as soft as leather and easy to clean – perfect for the kitchen or outdoor dining.

➤ Avoid delicate fabrics like silks. Tightly-woven wools in dark colors don't show spills. If you're wed to lighter colors, choose well-fitted slipcovers in washable cotton blends that feel tailored; avoid baggy "shabby chic" ones that can look messy. Also, consider using high-quality outdoor fabrics indoors. "They've become more sophisticated," she says.

➤ Add large-scale pieces. If you have fewer pieces of furniture, you'll have fewer edges for kids to bang into.

➤ Incorporate whimsy that you and the kids will appreciate, like the Ewalds' steel powder-painted orange "clip tables."

➤ Avoid "cute" decor in children's rooms, and hold back from painting rooms primary colors. Use a sophisticated color palette and incorporate vintage furniture.

➤ Consider concrete or dark-stained wood floors (you don't have to worry so much about spills). Also, FLOR carpet tiles are a smart choice for family rooms and playrooms, since you can replace the squares as needed.