

HOME  
*of the*  
MONTH

# Above

PHOTOGRAPHY BY THE HOME AESTHETIC

# ve and Beyond

A COUPLE WITH A LONG HISTORY AT TARKINGTON TOWER UNVEIL THEIR  
LATEST REMODEL, MATCHING THE BUILDING'S MIDCENTURY FLAIR.

BY MEGAN FERNANDEZ

A long entry with oversized images of Greek works like the *Venus de Milo* (left) builds anticipation for discovering other bold design choices.



Clockwise from top: When owner Susan Apple takes on a renovation—which she calls an “adoption”—her background enables her to act as contractor. The splendor on floor 15 includes three balconies and wraparound views, with an unobstructed panorama of the skyline and sweeping green canopies from Indy’s trees. Two solid-granite foo dogs weighing 2,000 pounds—they’re not going anywhere—each support a kitchen counter (below). A mix of modern and antique pieces creates drama worthy of the space.



# Susan

Apple does not like the word “flip.” “I adopt them out,” she says of the homes she has renovated with her husband, Harold. It sounds more familial, more loving—and it is. The couple has bought, rented, and sold 12 condos in Tarkington Tower, a few of which they have called home themselves. Susan’s mom and the couple’s son have their own places in the building. So extensive is their history of “adopting” in Tarkington over the last 17 years that their remodels tend to sell by word of mouth. “People put out feelers. It’s more like, *Okay, Susan’s got one ready.*” she says.

Susan studied interior design as well as psychology, but never worked in the field professionally. “I always say, ‘I can tell you what wallpaper to choose and why you chose it,’” she jokes.

When she and Harold sold their company, Vector Technologies, she began adopting and renovating, drawing on her experience in the antiques business. “I have a knack, and so many contacts for where to buy this or that,” she says.

Susan has acted as the general contractor on all of their projects. The latest combined their three-bedroom condo and the neighbor’s two-bedroom. When that owner was ready to move, the Apples traded her for their rental unit upstairs and merged their homes into arguably one of the most lavish addresses in the city, a 3,460-square-foot spread spanning the entire south end of the 15th floor, one level below the penthouse.

Owing partly to their long history as owners, the Apples were permitted to absorb their end of the common-space hallway. Now that section sits inside their entrance—black double doors with lion heads—as a long entry that telegraphs the drama

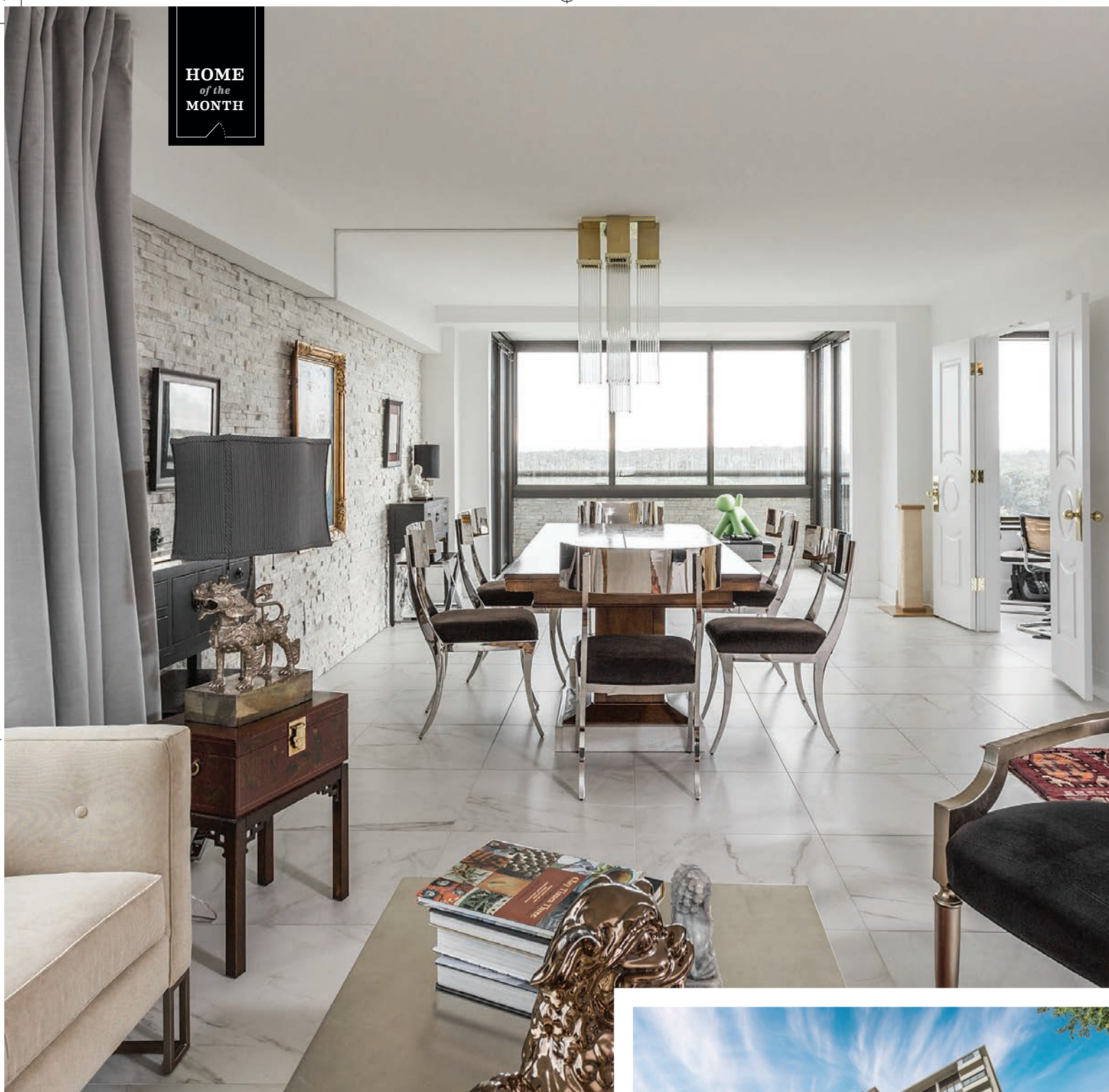


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With balconies at the east and west, residents can enjoy both the sunrise and the sunset. Two of the Apples' balconies were glassed in before the building passed a rule preventing such enclosures, making them coveted features in Tarkington Tower now.



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The base of an original Scolari chandelier in the dining room inspired the choice of metallics elsewhere in the living space. "That's why we started doing brass," Susan says.

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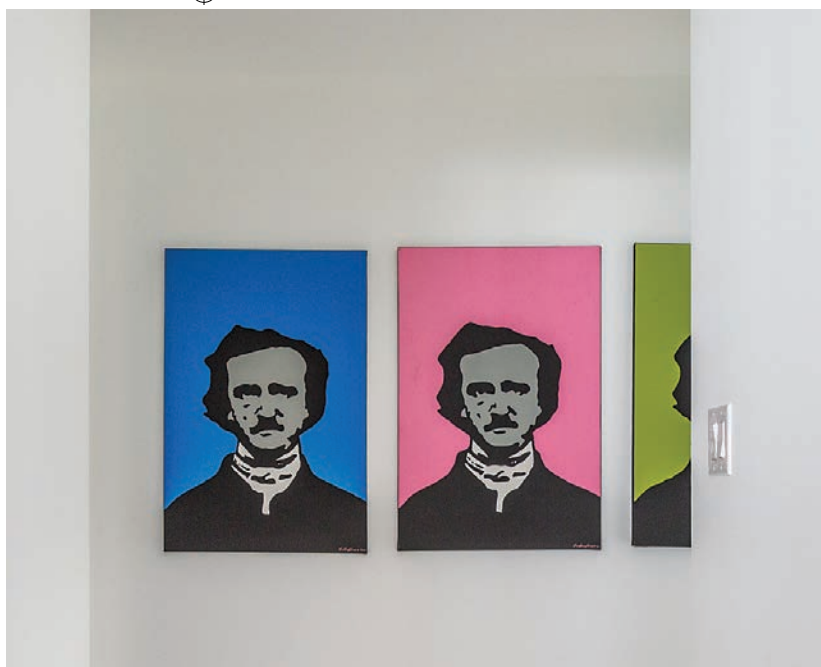


within. On one side, a black wall features an oversized image of the *Venus de Milo's* head in gray. Mirrors line the other side. Why the famous statue? "I have no clue," Susan admits. "I knew I wanted something bold."

Her answer is insouciant, and that's part of Susan's charm. She's a larger-than-life character who frequently hosts arts fundraisers, and the condo and all its eye candy do not overpower her. She and Harold breathe life into the scene when they speak of their love of the building, the neighborhood, and the environment they have created on 15. "I like gathering spaces right inside the entry," says Susan, pointing to the quartet of Barcelona chairs at the end of the entry hallway. Straight ahead, wall-to-wall windows flood an open living and entertaining space with southern light and a panoramic view of the city, far and wide. On a clear day, they can see the air-traffic control tower at the airport, the Pyramids, and Keystone at the Crossing. The couple can fit 75 people here comfortably. On one side is the kitchen, flowing into a couple of slick seating vignettes and a bar, then the dining room. Bedrooms and other private spaces have their own wings on opposite sides of the condo. There's no TV in sight; the couple's only one is in a black-walled den in the guest wing. One of Susan's pet peeves is a flat screen out in the open. "It's like an altar to the TV gods," she says.

Instead, art and antiques command one's attention in the Apples' gathering areas, and conversation pieces abound. Five brass columns divide the seating vignettes; on closer inspection, they are not columns at all, but HVAC pipes for the entire building. Removing a wall left them exposed, so Susan had each wire individually wrapped in a brass covering rather than leave the wall up. That's one of the advantages of longevity at Tarkington Tower. "We know where all the skeletons are," Susan says, "which concrete posts you can't get around and such."

Amid the space's black-and-white-and-silver gleam, a large, weathered console stands out. Working clock faces cover both sides. It came from a roller-skating rink at Louisville's Fontaine Ferry Park, and it sparks Susan's memory of a party they hosted during Midtown's annual holiday home tour. "I didn't want to do a Christmas theme," she says. "So we did a New Year's Eve



White walls provide the perfect backdrop for museum-quality art and strokes of whimsy, like the Edgar Allan Poe portraits (above). Susan chose matte black cabinets for the kitchen, as white ones would have produced too much glare from the windows—a trick of high-rise life that she has learned over time.



instead. Every clock in the house was set to midnight. We went through 12 cases of Easley champagne."

Parties flow into the kitchen around a massive 8-by-12 island. The kitchen could be mistaken for another living space. There are no upper cabinets, and the appliances are hidden behind panels, custom-made by Amish craftsmen because black panels are difficult to source, Susan says. The space isn't decorated like a normal kitchen, either. Two wild upholstered armchairs with the image of China's last emperor sit in one corner. The couple commissioned them from local graffiti artist Pete Brown, who incorporated a QR code that brings up the emperor's story online. A mosaic of painted floppy disks—the old hard plastic kind—by Stutz artist Taylor Smith hangs nearby. Around the corner, a piece by John Ross, another longtime Stutz painter, re-creates a famous New York

City salon scene, with Harper Lee and Truman Capote—and Harold and Susan in the middle of the party, drinks in hand.

For all of the intrigue inside the condo, the Apples prefer to talk about the building's benefits and what's happening beyond the walls. In the foreground, North United Methodist Church and Tarkington Park protect their view. "We absolutely know this is never going to change," Susan says. From their quiet perch in the sky, they can watch the once-vibrant part of Butler Tarkington bounce back. A city plan called Great Places 2020, intended to spruce up six neighborhoods in Marion County, started with the intersection of 38th and Illinois Streets, two blocks from Tarkington Tower. A makeover of Tarkington Park was just completed as the first major project. Future plans call for affordable apartments and a farmers market next to the church, a brewery on

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Traditional artwork fills the master bedroom. Why the departure from the condo's modern style? Because Susan grew up in Brown County's art world and knew many of the Hoosier Group painters—all of the pieces in the bedroom are from her stomping grounds. One over the bed won the Hoosier Salon in the 1940s. Another is a painting her "nephew had been using for dart practice" before Susan rescued it. Bells and whistles in the custom walk-in closets include a crystal chandelier and metallic Formica countertops that match the bar.



Illinois Street, and facade improvements along 38th.

One thing the plan probably won't include is another high-rise, at least not north of 40th Street. When Tarkington Tower was built in 1968, homeowners on Meridian Street became concerned that such development would take over the grand corridor. This led to the creation of the Meridian Street Preservation Commission and a state law preventing more high-rises in the area. The Apples are confident that Tarkington will remain peerless as an option for urban high-rise living in Midtown, and they love its stability. The building's coffers, they say, are healthy. "You don't want to get slapped with a \$20,000 fee because the building doesn't have enough reserve to put on a new roof," Harold says. "We've never had a special assessment here."

They looked downtown when they became empty-nesters and wanted to relocate, but they didn't like what they saw—especially out the windows of the Conrad, where they say their view would have been all rooftops. They also prefer Midtown's location for easy access to both downtown and the north side. It's the only building in the city with a 24-hour concierge. Tarkington Tower is making a comeback, too, as urban living has become more in vogue. It's no longer just an old-money address. Susan led a sleek update of the common spaces about five years ago, and more than half of the 90 condos have been sold in that time, ushering in a younger demographic. "When I started selling 20 years ago, this building was so tired," says Joe Everhart, the couple's Realtor.

So why leave? The Apples aren't. They just plan to move upstairs to the 16th floor and take on another remodel. Susan has an itch for hot pink right now. But the couple is in no hurry, which is always a good time to put a house on the market (for \$1.25 million) and wait for the right offer. Everhart expects interest to come from the tech sector; he has seen an influx of those buyers recently. "A lot are coming from the West Coast," he says. "The finishes they will see here, the technology, are going to win them over, especially at this price point. You can't touch this in San Francisco for less than 7 or 8 million. I'm kind of cynical when it comes to this stuff now. But when I walked in ... nothing has been this freaky-good all the way through. They nailed it. It's a real connoisseur's place." 🐾



The master suite includes his-and-hers adjacent bathrooms. His dazzles with a backlit onyx shower (above). The stone came from IUPUI's fine-dining restaurant, Chancellor's, which closed when the University Hotel was converted to dorms. Susan snagged the whole slab for \$400 on Craigslist from a seller who had bought it at the salvage sale. Susan's white-marble bathroom includes a playful touch: A bronze bill clip in the shape of a dog holds a hand towel in its mouth.

