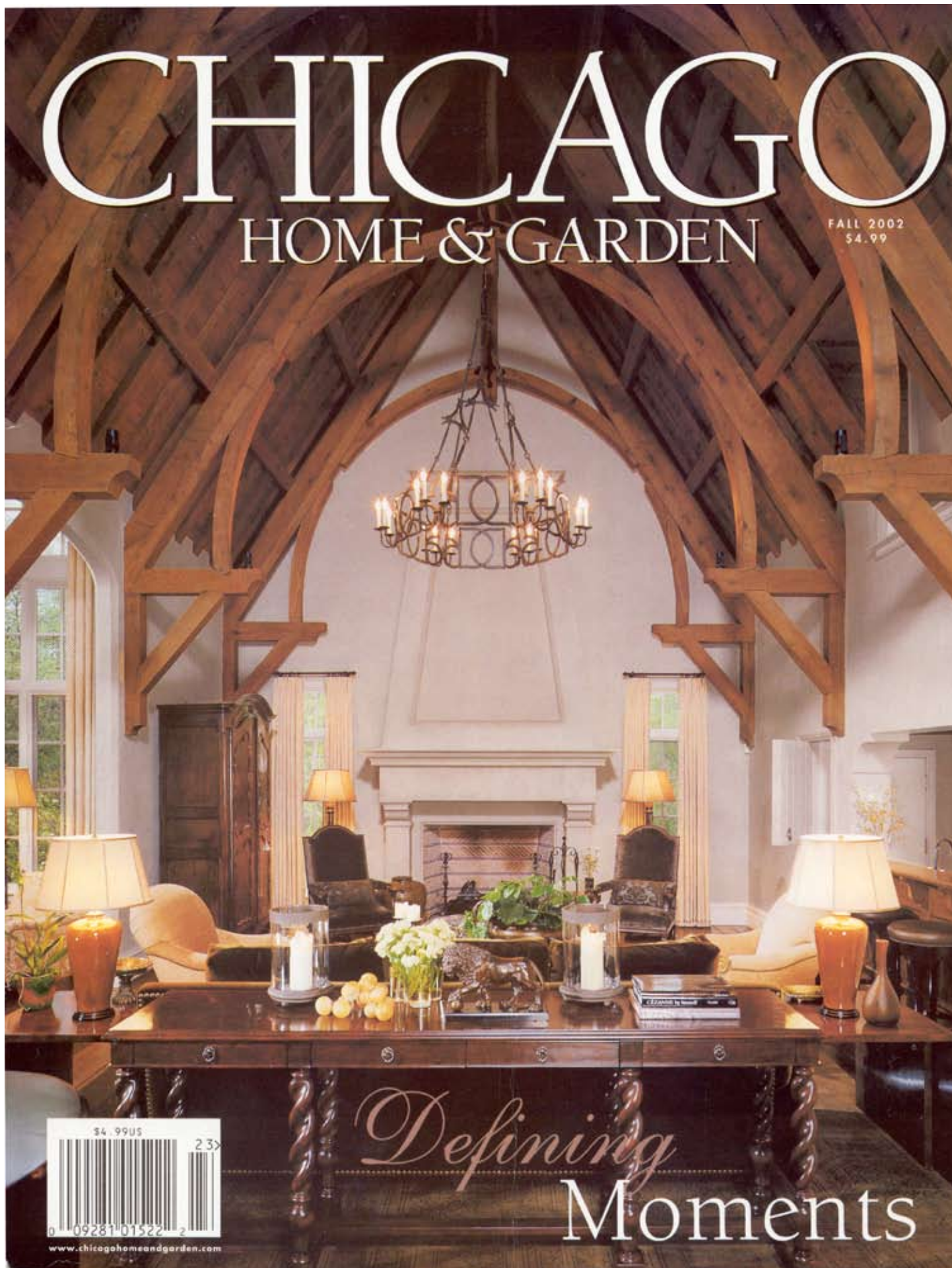


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HOME & GARDEN

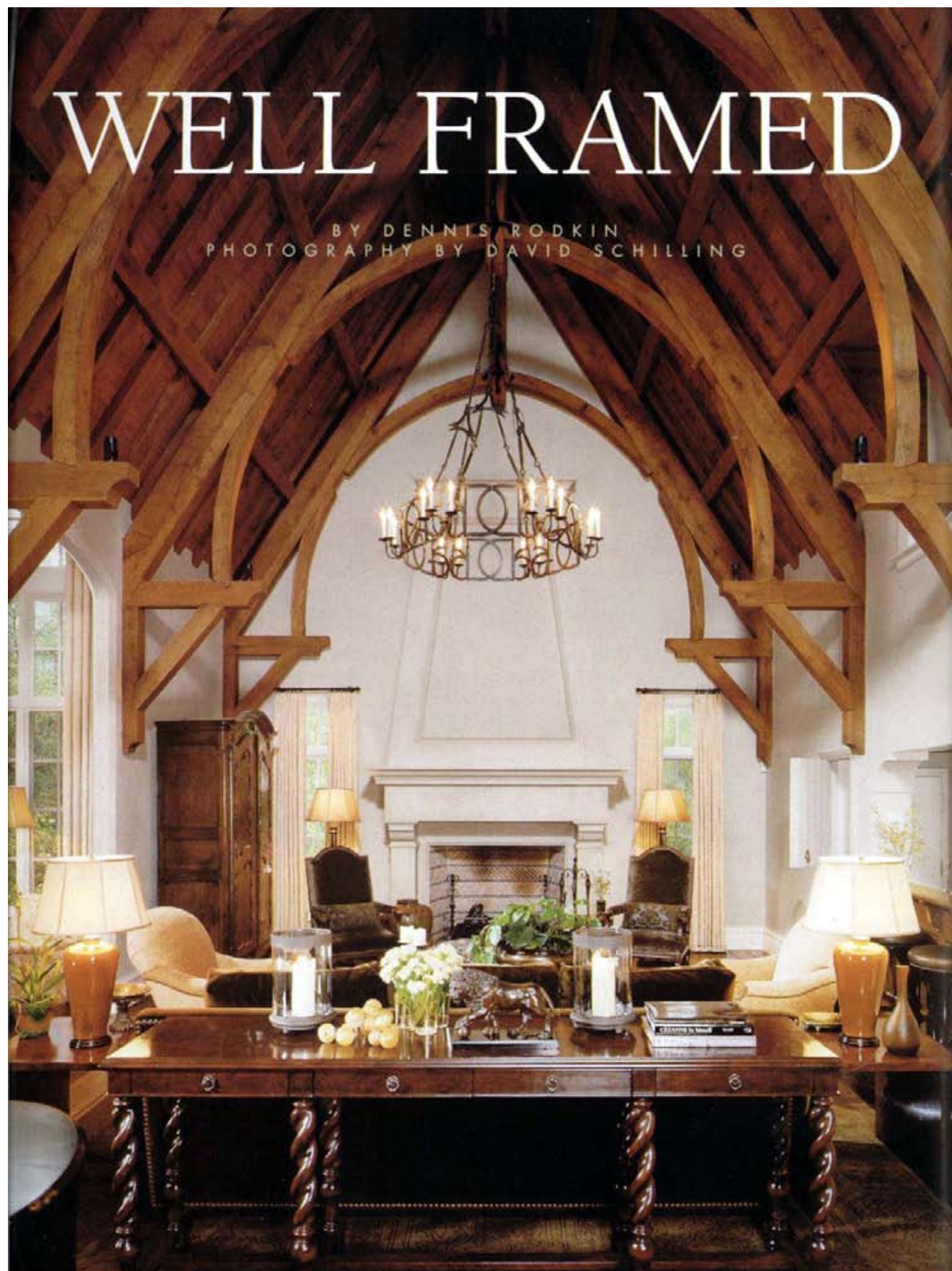
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Defining
Moments

WELL FRAMED

BY DENNIS RODKIN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID SCHILLING



mid-winter day, not just Chicago cold, but Wisconsin cold, at ten below zero, when John Lehman and Phillip Liederbach went to look at a stand of hickory trees on a farm in Princeton, Wisconsin, near Oshkosh. It was so cold that anyone else would have turned around and driven straight back to Lake Forest without ever getting out of the car.

But these two were on a mission. They had driven up to check out a farmer's stand of old, gnarled hickories, trees he was planning to cut down to make way for a new field. "We had to make sure they had the character we wanted, that they'd had a hard life and showed it," says Phillip, an architect, of the goal he and his client had that bitterly cold day.

Wood was to be a prime feature of the interior of John and

(left) Arches within peaks lend the living room the feel of a country chapel or a shipwright's workshop. Phillip wanted to have both beams and panels in sight to "expose the structure of the house and make something beautiful at the same time."

(upper right) The drive in from the street curves through a young apple orchard before revealing the full house, a stately but inviting French country mansion. The wide entry court is surrounded by formal plantings, the front facade equally ordered. It's a sharp contrast from the relaxed feeling that prevails within the house and in the backyard beyond—a vast meadow of wildflowers extending to a forested area.

(lower right) Architect Phillip Liederbach wanted to complement Lake Forest's traditions of English- and French-inspired mansions with his design for the Lehman house. Initially, he drew up a Tudor house, but both he and his clients soon realized that the countrified elegance of a French design would suit the casual interior better.



Although some rooms open onto one another freely, like the kitchen and breakfast room, Phillip used ample wall thickness to preserve their boundaries. The fireside armchairs and the calming wall colors are part of the relaxed, Tuscan feeling that flows through the house, says interior designer Alan Boyd.

Peggy Lehman's new house in east Lake Forest. Timeless hand-carved wooden beams would deck the main hallway and combine for a custom-built kitchen cabinet, reminiscent of an antique French armoire, designed to contain an out-sized refrigerator. Most impressive of all, they'd appear in the majestic living room where a forest of exposed beams would support a vaulted ceiling.

So, the wood had to be good. John had been enthusiastic about the idea of hand-picking the trees for his millwork, but after trudging over hard-frozen fields, the two men arrived, chilled bone deep, at the trees. "I looked up at them, said, 'Yeah, fine,' and ran back to the car," John says. "It was a little anti-climactic."

The house that resulted from that cut-short visit contains no such letdowns. Completed in summer 2001 on a four-acre lot, the Lehmans' home is a series of thrills, from the unmatched charm of the living room to the serene comfort of the master bath suite and on into the gym in the attic. There, a small balcony not only sports a bird's-eye view of the naturalized backyard but also puts the steep slate roof at reach-out-and-touch-it distance, so guests can feast their eyes in one direction and their fingers in the other.

A genuine collaboration between architect and client, the house fits the Lehmans' life







like an impeccably tailored suit. While it's unquestionably a big house, something over 10,500 square feet in all, it's a decidedly informal and inviting place, peppered throughout with reading nooks and quiet retreats. Walls colors come primarily from a palette of honey yellows that are not perky, sunshine tones but warm and soothing, with browns, greens, and other accents contributing to the tranquility.

"They wanted a calm place, a house that is comfortable and friendly, very accessible," Phillip says. Even the flourishes, like the spectacular beamed living room, are more about warmth and welcome than about show.

It's no surprise that the Lehmans would wind up with a house that fits them well, it's their fifth try in a dozen years. Starting with a west Lake Forest house they bought and customized when it was partially finished, they've had three houses built for themselves and their three children in Lake Forest and two in Scottsdale.

The second house in Lake Forest, completed in 1996, turned out after a few years to be everything they imagined but nothing they wanted. "I decorated it all, so blame me, but it was all very French and formal," Peggy says. "I got carried away by the pictures I had clipped and the picture books I had collected. It was a 'wonderful house, but we're jeans, Eddie Bauer, the Gap kind of people, and that house was not us.'"

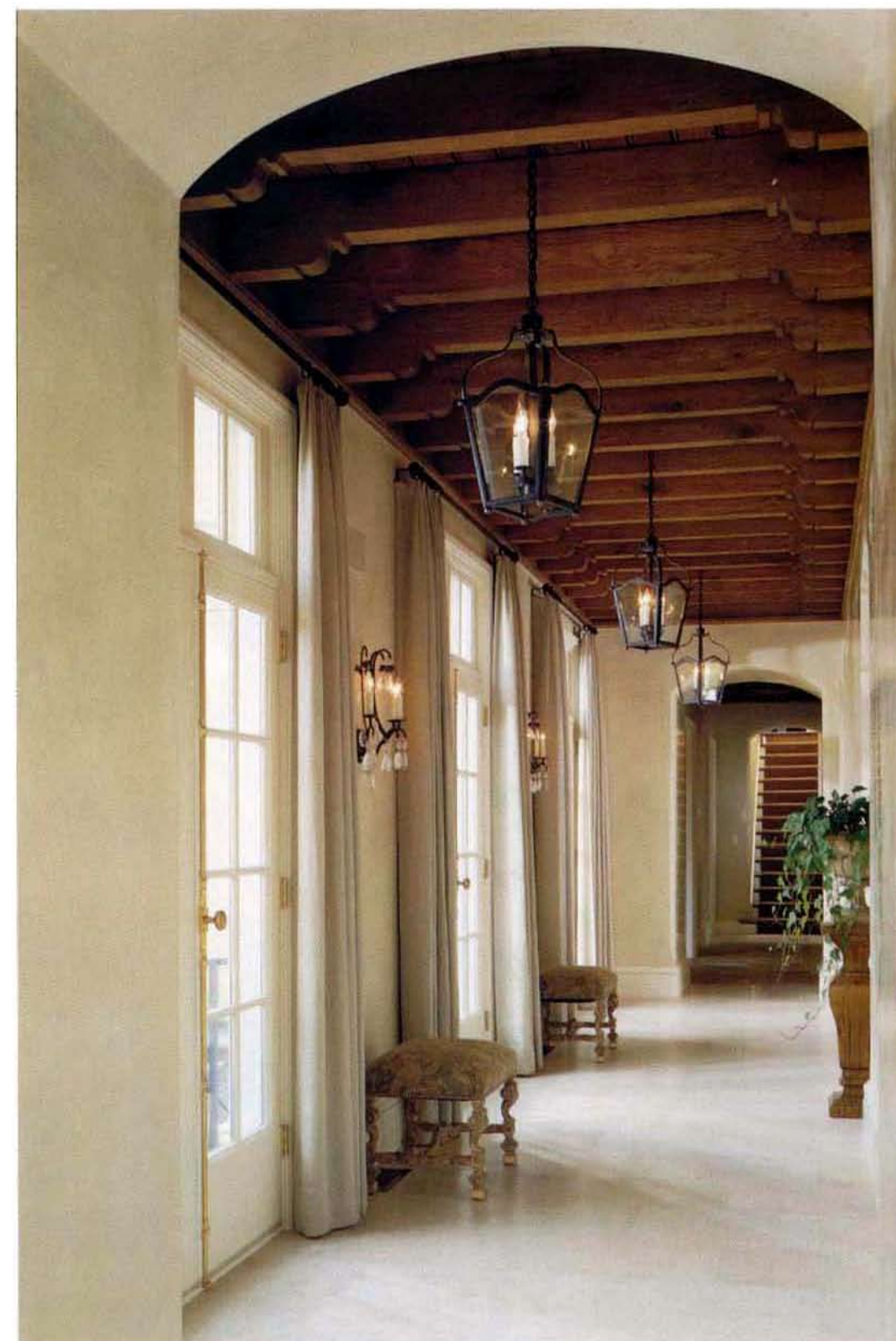
They were less inclined to rework the old house in their image than to start over from the ground up. "We're both project people," Peggy says. "John is a stifled architect and I'm a stifled decorator."

The couple started watch-

(preceding pages) The living room opens into the dining room, an upstairs sitting room, small reading space, and a bar (not seen in photo). "If we had just had all these separate rooms without open links between them, it would have been a dull house, just a bunch of different rooms," Phillip says.

(left) A stairway rises upward, connecting lower and upper levels which have a common denominator in a lofty sitting area overlooking the living room below.

(below) Beamed ceilings are a major feature of the home's first floor, but they vary from room to room. In one room, the spaces between are plastered; in another the wood is visible. In some rooms, the beams are squared. Here, in a gallery hallway that spans the front of the house, they have articulated ends that enliven an otherwise rectilinear space.





cabinet with clock at left conceals the refrigerator. The table at center boasts legs made from lumber from a demolished New England barn. Both pieces of millwork are examples of the "commitment to making it look like it's always been there," says Harold Dieters of the Kenosha firm Wilmot Woodworks, which handled all the millwork in the house.

(right) A sitting room upstairs is its own discrete space but opens on one side to the beams of the living room. Alan used just two touches of green—velvet pillows and the oval ottoman—to link this haven to the living room's green carpeting. "It's part of the living room and not part of the living room, so you make a little link and leave it alone," he says.

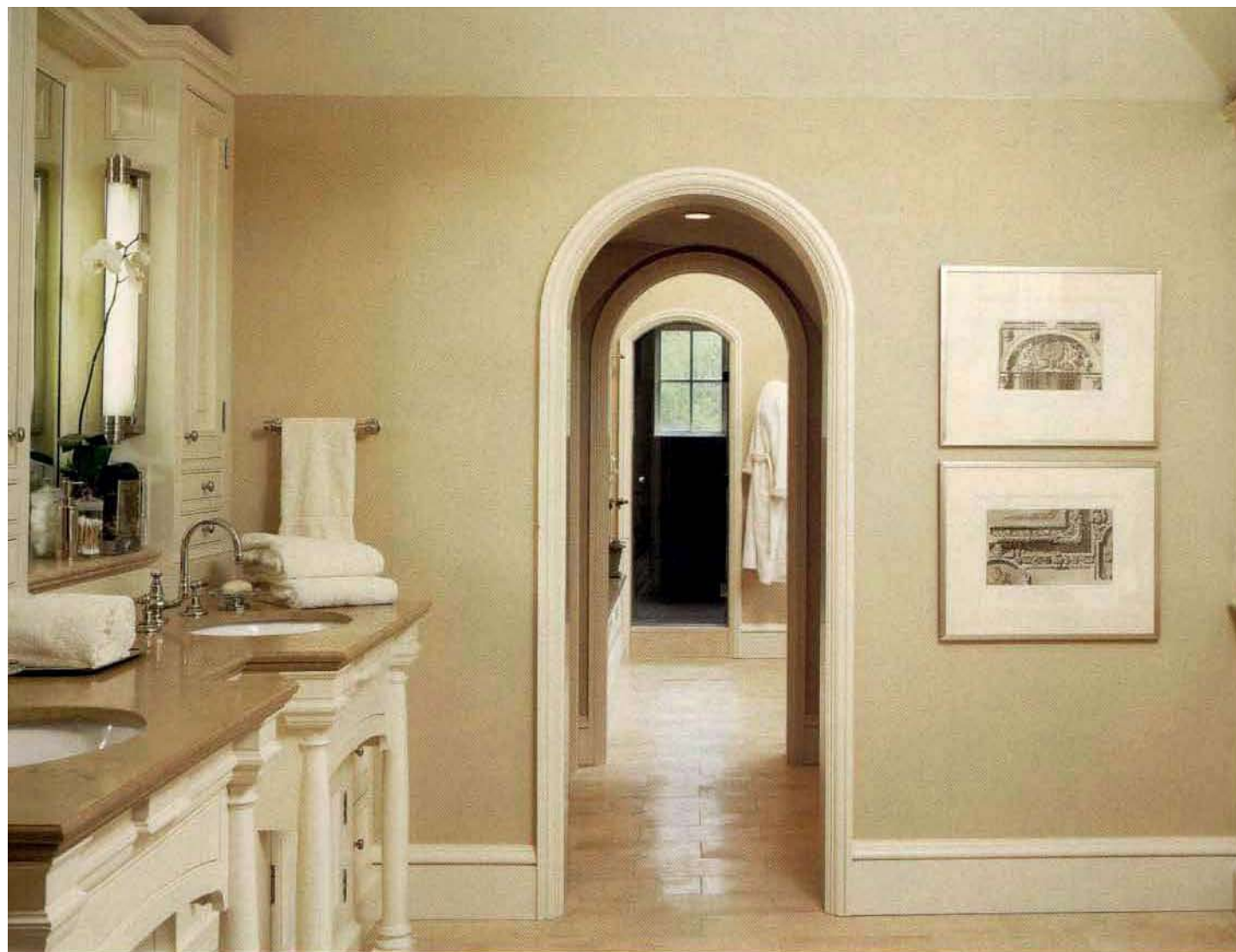
ing for an appropriate lot to come on the market. Soon they discovered a beautiful, somewhat secluded lot in a central part of town where the existing house was in terrible shape and sure to be a teardown. The owner had been just about ready to list it for sale, so the Lehmans bought it and started plotting their next project.

For the first time in their building career, the Lehmans opted to use a freestanding architect rather than a designer-builder. They met several of Chicago's finest and hit it off best with Phillip, largely because his office operation, Phillip and Graham, was a lot like their home life: "He doesn't have a big, formal operation with a department for this and a department for that," Peggy says. "His own desk is a door

(following spread) Exposed beams add volume and texture to the dining room. The oval niche in the wall at left, a last-minute concession to the oversized sideboard Peggy Lehman picked up in France and couldn't be without, interacts nicely with the depth of the beamed ceiling.







(left) A composition of simple arches unites the small rooms of the bath and directs traffic through this vanity area to a tub area with a 12-foot ceiling and on to a "snail shower," a room where the shower is tucked behind a wall and needs no curtain or doors.

(below) Peaceful and set apart from the three other family bedrooms, the master suite "is intended to feel isolated and private" Phillip says. Big readers and infrequent television watchers, John and Peggy nevertheless do like to watch TV now and then. Because it gets so little use, the television is tucked inside the wooden chest at the foot of the bed. At the touch of a button, a mini-elevator lifts the television up to eye level. "Hiding it in there was great," John says. "It's out of the way when we don't need it."

gallery hallway, in the breakfast room, and elsewhere, but it's in the living room that the wood really takes center stage. Phillip says, "Even though there's a lot of it, I think the wood really brings the living room down to a human scale," Phillip states. "The idea with the big brackets was to bring the wood out to where you can examine it and almost touch it."

Opening directly onto the living room, the dining room is equally self-composed. The high-backed chairs are covered with supple, comfortable leather, the ceiling is low, and the art and other accessories

exude quiet. "We wanted people to be able to sit in the living room for a while with us, then walk right over here to dinner, and then move back to the living room after," Peggy says. "and not have to march down some long hallway from one room to the other."

Above the dining room is a pleasant sitting room that characterizes the house. Off the master suite and overlooking the living room, it blurs the distinctions between public and private rooms. "We can sit out here and read in the morning by ourselves, or you can bring a couple of guests up here to get away

from a party in the living room and talk," Peggy says. Either way, it's a sanctuary, a small, set-apart room that allows a view of the intricate beams and the living room below.

The Lehmans' discomfort with ostentation is especially evident in their bathroom suite. Rather than some palatial Roman bath, it's a series of small rooms linked by an arched passageway. "We separated the bathroom into a series of small rooms, each with its own purpose," Phillip says.

Tied together by their restful, spa-quality color scheme, the rooms don't feel like cubby-

holes but like individual pieces of a whole. In fact, virtually everything in the Lehmans' house seems to hang together. Pick up a piece of furniture or art in any room, and there will be a suitable place for it somewhere else in the home. The colors on the walls and other objects largely blend together as well.

Consistency was a stylistic choice meant to endow the house with a feeling of peace, Phillip notes. "It has a calming influence, and peace and calm are elusive qualities in today's world," he says. **CHG**

put on top of some file cabinets. You can sit down and feel comfortable with him."

Phillip had worked in the office of noted architect Thomas Beeby before opening a firm with Michael Graham in the early 1990s. Most of his designs are residential; they have been built in Chicago, New York City, Aspen, and Antigua, among other places. For the Lehmans, he designed a French country estate with strong symmetry, big geometrical masses, and a broad entry court at the end of a tree-lined drive.

"When you first drive up, it looks pretty grand," John says. "It surprises some of my friends;

it even surprised me a little bit at first. But then you get inside and it looks a lot more comfortable."

Enormously more comfortable, in fact. The living room and dining room are airy and welcoming, really not all that big. "The rooms open onto each other, and onto others, like in a modern floor plan," Phillip notes.

The living room is nothing short of superb in scale and appointments. The beams and wood panels in the ceiling draw the eye upward, but there's enough down below to welcome the eye back to human level. An oversized fireplace, a low-ceilinged bar, a sunlit, octag-

onal reading nook, and a central seating arrangement don't compete with the ceiling, but they're pleasing sights nonetheless.

"We had to have furniture that's large-scaled in that room; you can't put anything small in there or it's lost beneath that 27-foot ceiling," says Alan Boyd, the New York-based interior designer who furnished the house. The drapes, he notes, look at first glance like simple damask. "But when you go over and look at them, they have a beautiful trim, very subtle," he says. "To me, the success of that whole room is that every time you sit in there more things reveal themselves. You

look at that great ceiling, but then you're not done. There's also a pattern in the carpet, a fabric on a chair. It keeps your eye interested."

Although the immensity of the ceiling suggests a chapel, Phillip says the composition of the whole room brings image of 1920s Hollywood to mind. Confidently casual, but with a nod toward grandeur, it's meant to be a room that gets used. "The Lehmans aren't the type to have a superfluous living room," he says. "They're in there whether they have guests or not."

Who wouldn't be, with all that gorgeous wood to look at. There are more beams along

