

Liquid Luxury

A contemporary West Eugene home immersed in sophistication



BY AARON RAGAN-FORE

“EVENTUALLY, ALL THINGS MERGE into one, and a river runs through it,” wrote Norman Maclean.

The sentiment was intended as a life lesson, but it’s just as descriptive of the stylish, contemporary home of Domenic Ruffatto, perched on a hill in Eugene’s Summit Terrace neighborhood. While ascending the grand front staircase, the first detail a visitor notices is that a small waterfall runs alongside the steps, seemingly from under the foundation. The rivulet appears to originate in the backyard, descending a sheer cliff face and disappearing below the home, giving the illusion of water moving through or under the building. The structure itself possesses an elegant curb appeal, its storied layers rising like a terraced, cream-colored wedding cake.



THIS PAGE: The water feature in the entry divides the space without disrupting the flow of the open floor plan. OPPOSITE: A view of the rivulet from the dining area.



The home's open floor plan permits all-around views of the foyer's freestanding glass-veneered water feature.

“We don't like to build the proverbial box,” says Dan Cooper, the chief designer of the multimillion-dollar home, which he has named *Virtuosity*. Even the most cursory glance beyond the entryway confirms that Cooper's stylistic plan for the home, a trendy fusion he dubs “urban craftsman,” is anything but boxlike. Nearly every living space within the home's open floor plan commands a view of the foyer's freestanding, glass-veneered water feature. It's a piece of tactual, auditory sculpture continuing the home's H₂Obsession.

The liquid artwork beautifully reflects the radiance of the home's energy-maximizing lighting system, accessed remotely by a handheld control panel. Six miles of wiring throughout the 5,520-square-foot home connect seven refrigerators, two built-in coffeemakers, three washing machines, three dishwashers and a whopping 12 televisions.



Water, water everywhere

The striking kitchen sports a central island of alder, resting on gray porcelain flooring tiles and framed by warm-hued interior columns. This state-of-the-art cooking space gleams with stainless steel General Electric appliances, Labradorite countertops and an iridescent, gray-green glass tile backsplash. The color choices and high sheen of the kitchen are decidedly aquatic in nature. The kitchen matches not only the foyer water feature, but also the spartan industrial design of the four full and three half bathrooms throughout the home.

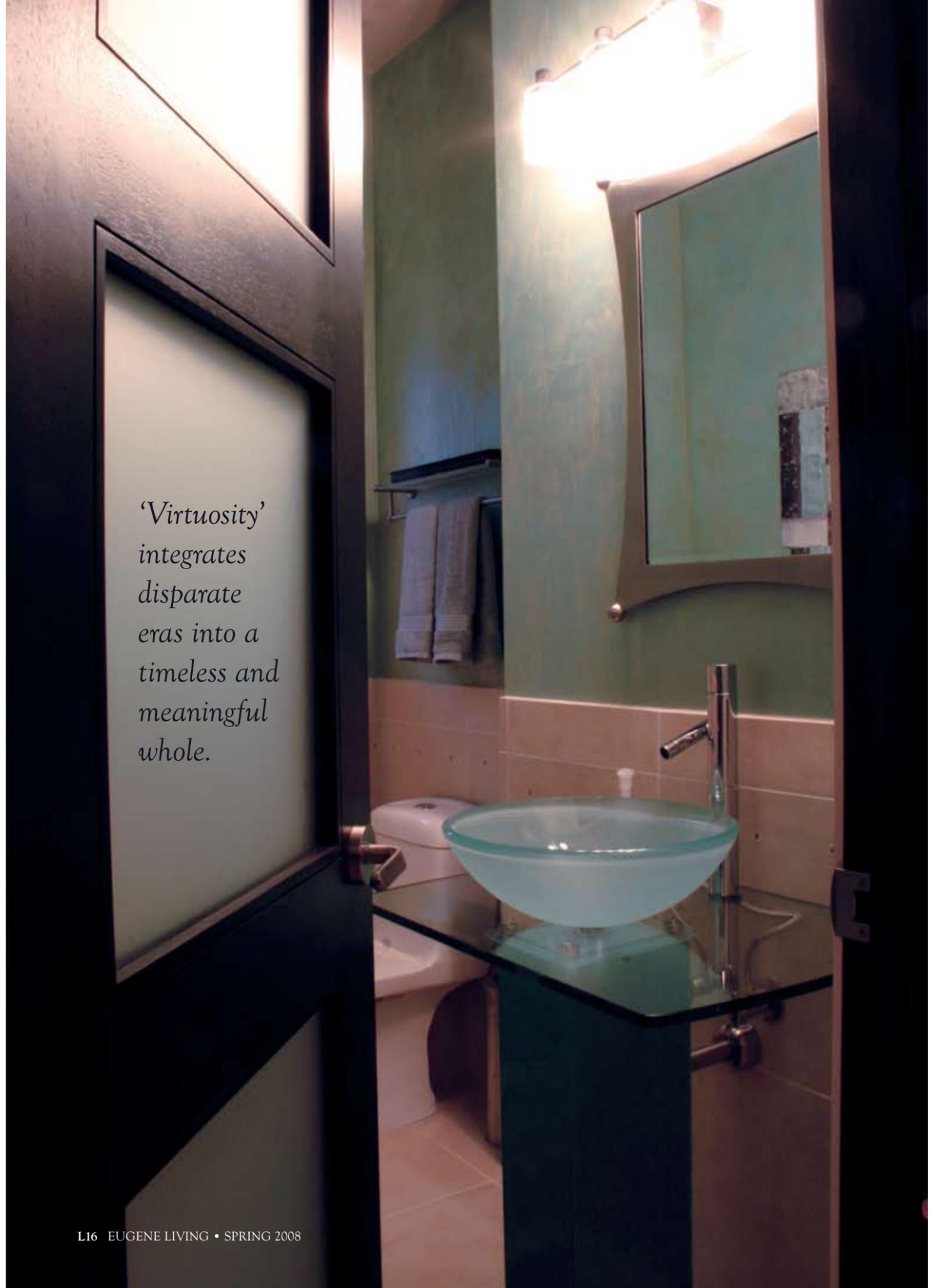
Don't assume that the cool palette makes the main level of this architectural stunner cold or off-putting, though. "I was very aware that I needed certain things like warm color choices and bringing in fabric to soften the urban feel," says homeowner Ruffatto, the founder and president of the Servo Technologies Group, a company that services and sells automation machinery for the timber, automotive and plastics industries.

Although the house showcases a solidly masculine feel throughout, Ruffatto isn't afraid to show his sensitive side. The bathrooms feature textured walls reminiscent of a linen pattern, and one crimson-colored hallway serves as a passionate counterpoint to a comfortable living area dressed in inviting neutrals. It's these sorts of softer elements that make a house a home, a place where Ruffatto can enjoy a quiet evening of family time with his college-aged daughters, Devin and Demi.

The rich alder wood and warm lighting contrast with the cool grey of the Labradorite countertops and porcelain floor tiles. The open floor plan of the main level permits views of the indoor and outdoor water features.



The gracious interior decoration is the product of Dan Cooper's mother, Mary. Indeed, Cooper's business, DC Fine Homes and Interiors, is a family affair, with his father, Duane, on staff as lead foreman. "The entire family all had contributing ideas and input into the home, which helped tremendously," explains Ruffatto. "The finished product speaks for itself."



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THIS PAGE: The stairway leading to the second level.

OPPOSITE (top to bottom): One of the home's many unique bathrooms, and a modern control in the master shower.

Chilling in the Sky Loft

Climbing the staircase, Ruffatto's visitors find that the higher elevations of the modern second-floor Sky Loft have frozen the water of the kitchen and living areas into a dazzling ice motif. The melted, hammered and frosted finish on an interior glass window sculpture mimics the look of a snow-covered range of mountain peaks, a theme that continues in the cool whites and icy greens of a fused-glass fireplace, cantilevered hearth and bar countertops.

This level also includes a gym and three of the four bedroom suites, including the master. Here, Ruffatto's enclave-within-an-enclave features a "morning area" with builtin coffeemaker and laptop station, a 100-square-foot walk-in closet and a master bath with a clothlike Armani ceiling pattern and spacious steam shower.





The second-floor Sky Loft features unique glass and lighting around the fireplace and bar area.



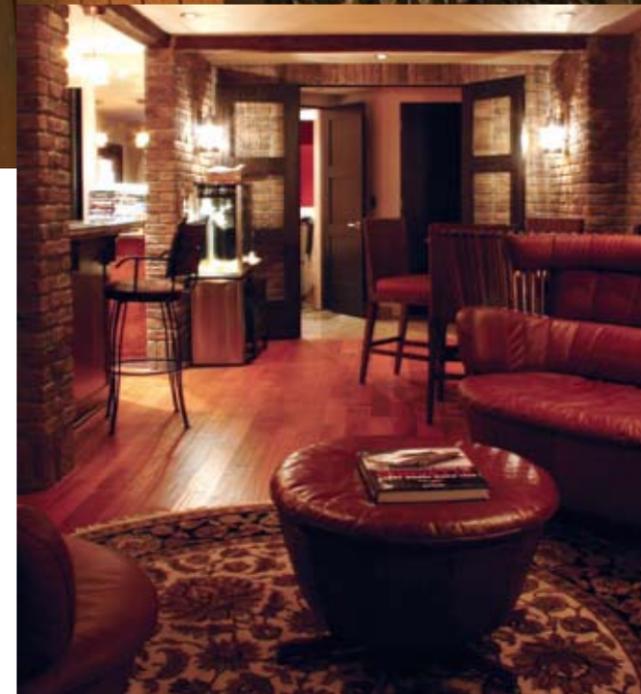
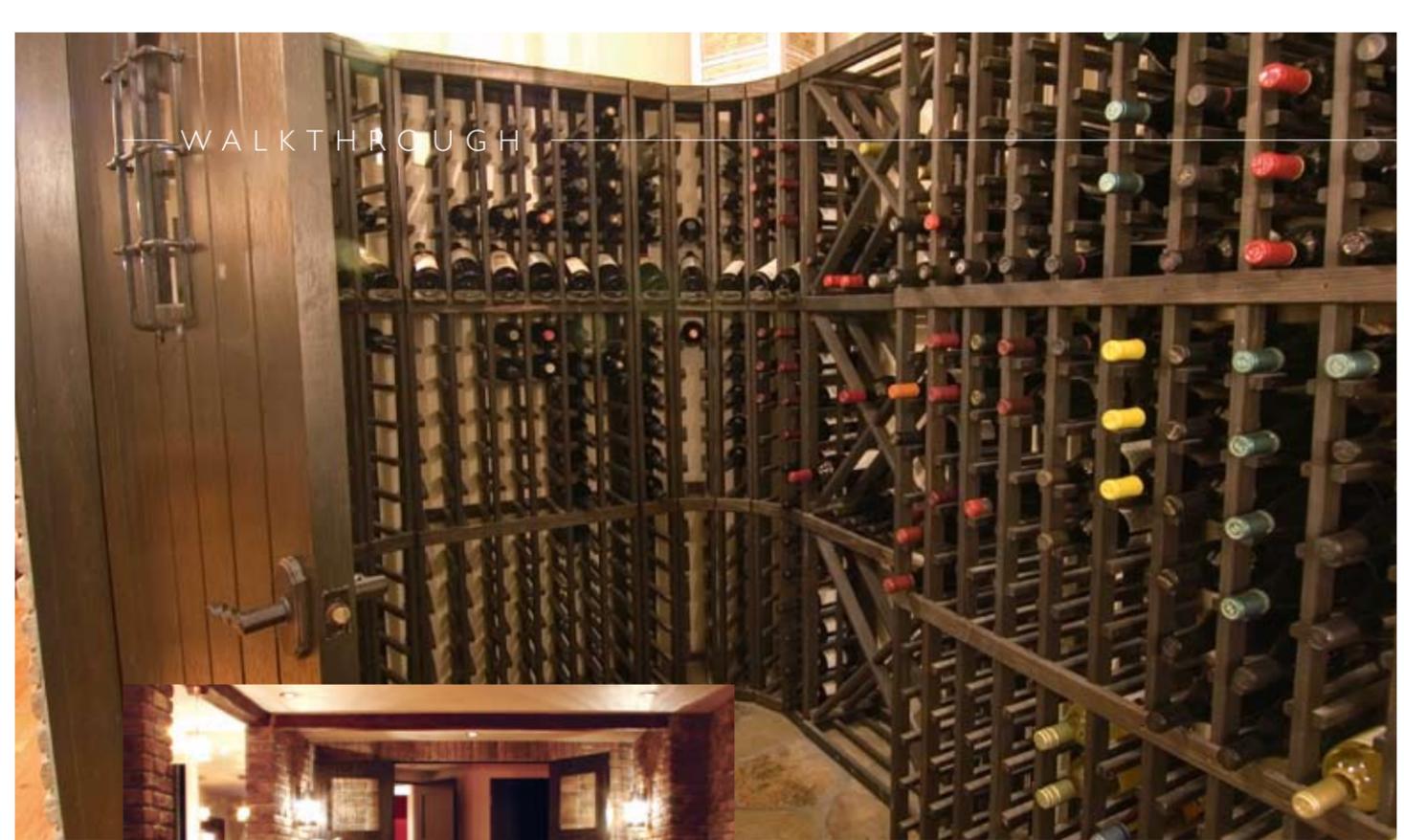


The master suite also features a doggie bed, one of several throughout the home dedicated to the comfort of Bo, Ruffatto's yellow Labrador retriever. Lane County residents do tend to go all out for their pets, it's true, but not every dog can claim he has a view: One of Bo's beds is situated on the exterior deck of the master suite, where its occupant enjoys a sweeping panorama of West Eugene spread below. On a clear day, Ruffatto and Bo can even enjoy the sights of Fern Ridge Reservoir.

The very act of the home's construction was an amazing feat in itself. Virtuosity was chosen for inclusion in the Home Builders Association of Lane County's July 2007 Tour of Homes; as the property was still a vacant lot in December 2006, there was no time to be wasted if the deadline was to be met. "Many of the builders in that same area, who started their homes at least six months prior, were all betting Dan could not pull this off," says Ruffatto. "I suppose that spurred Dan on all the more."

Cooper's competitive work ethic came in handy when the building site encountered some unique challenges. The time crunch was exacerbated by the fact that building into the hillside required the removal of 375 truckloads of soil and rock. Over the ensuing months, the builders faced off against mudslides, an ice storm, even the theft of their tools

The spacious master suite has spectacular views of the city.



Ruffatto's Old-World style pub and wine cellar.

from the construction site. "You have to learn to fix on the fly," shrugs Cooper. But he is only halfway joking when he says the property was completed at 11:59 a.m., one minute before the noon kickoff of the Tour of Homes.

Merging visions

Throughout the design and construction process, Cooper and Ruffatto worked closely to keep their individual visions of designer and homeowner on target. "It was like a marriage," says Cooper of the professional relationship. "We were talking seven, eight times a day, and meeting once, twice a day."

"The scope of this home required this much attention, and I wouldn't build another home with anyone but Dan and his family," Ruffatto concludes.

The DC Fine Homes team was even flexible when it came to Ruffatto's personal preferences in altering the sublime design. As a wine hobbyist, Ruffatto knew he would need a wine cellar—but why stop there? On the home's basement level, Cooper designed an entire wood-beamed, Old World-style pub around the wine cellar for his client, complete with two full-sized not-so-OldWorld video games.

It's here in the underground pub, the most rustic part of the house, where you find Virtuosity's brain: the automation system that controls the lighting, climate, intercom, audiovisual and security systems. Next door to the pub are Ruffatto's private home theater, seating 10 (it has proved perfect for Monday Night Football parties), and the three-car garage, home to some serious muscle, including a 1967 Ford Mustang convertible. In this aquatically focused home, it seems only natural that the classic car should be sea-foam green in color.

Virtuosity integrates disparate eras into a timeless and meaningful whole. The property is a collaboration between past and future, between water and light, and between designer Cooper and homeowner Ruffatto.

"The next time you're driving on Bailey Hill Road, look up," says Cooper. "You'll see this house. It's like a beacon." ■

Aaron Ragan-Fore, a regular contributor to this magazine, is completing a master's degree in the Literary Nonfiction program at the University of Oregon.