



LOFTY ambitions

Justin Sawyer, M.D., meet Traci Shields, ASID – a well-designed Internet match and the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

No, they're not ogling one another, rather they are Googling: Together, they've created the beauty that is Dr. Sawyer's two-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bathroom loft in downtown Tempe. Sawyer is a dermatologist practicing in east Mesa. He engaged his computer search engine to find Shields, a partner in the longstanding Friedman & Shields interior design firm based in Scottsdale. >

AT HOME

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Interior Design by

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About four years ago, Sawyer saw the 3,159-square-foot penthouse in the Orchid House on the campus of Arizona State University. Part of the Brickyard complex, the 8,000-square-foot Orchid House is a mixed-use building, incorporating, on the street level, retail and the world-class ASU Decision Theater, a visualization and simulative research center, and offices and luxe residences above.

Looking for a refuge pad for entertaining friends and for living amidst the agog of downtown, Sawyer immediately liked all aspects of the once-owned home.

“When I first saw the penthouse at Orchid House, I thought it was the most striking condo I had ever been in,” he recalled. “I remember thinking it would be incredible to be able to live in that space, while having everything on Mill Avenue at your fingertips. And, I have to admit, I thought the stars on the master ceiling were pretty cool.”

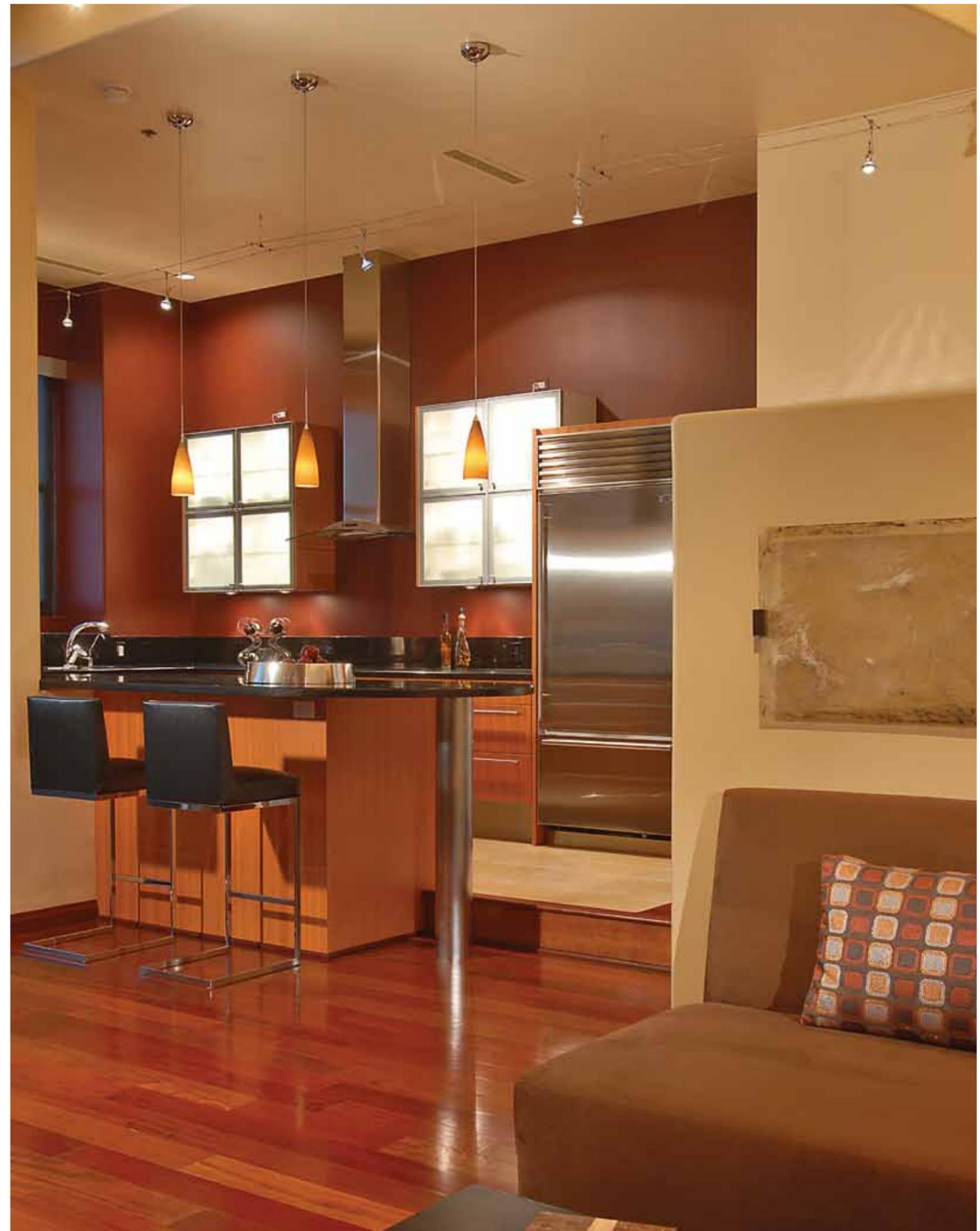
He added: “I really enjoy the pedestrian lifestyle of Mill Avenue, which had always been my favorite part of town to walk around. I like the youthful, casual feel of Mill and love being able to walk to so many restaurants, coffee shops, book stores and even to the movies.”

Just outside are restaurants such as House of Tricks, Rula Bula and Gordon Biersch, as well as nightclubs and the boutiques and shops that continue to make downtown

Tempe the Valley’s finest urban experience. So, too, he and his friends have the resources and entertainment venues at the main campus of ASU a short walk away. The light rail station is a block away, giving him access to other areas of Tempe, Mesa and Phoenix.

Architecturally, Sawyer is inspired every day: He can see the Frank Lloyd-Wright-designed Gammage Auditorium from the south-facing terrace (one of three); walk to Antoine Predock’s Nelson Fine Arts Center; or, by the Tempe Town Lake, the Tempe Center for the Arts, designed by Tempe’s Architekton in conjunction with Barton Myers Associates of Los Angeles. Any direction in which he goes, he can find great places, activities and delights.

During the week, after office hours, he often walks to the restaurants for take-out. “On weekends, I often catch one of the cabs on Mill and head up to Scottsdale. Occasionally, I will jump on ▶





the light rail to either try out a new restaurant in downtown Phoenix or to go to a Suns game. What I most look forward to is to walk to Starbucks each Saturday and Sunday morning with my girlfriend, Polly, for a coffee and the New York Times.”

The stars on the master ceiling? “I have to show you this,” he told me excitedly. He dimmed the main lights, and a heavenly LED ceiling appeared, as if I were looking up high in the mountains after dark. That’s an inspiring soporific – especially in an artificial-light-filled Valley, where major constellations are often difficult to find, even on a good night.

But a “Star Wars” ceiling is just one of many outstanding attractions of Justin’s place. A large spa-like master bath suite fitted with a jetted soaking tub, a large frosted-glass mosaic-tile shower and an LED-lit vanity is a relaxing retreat after work and play, and an expansive great room centers on a large custom pool table, where he and his buddies rack them up while watching sports on a large flat-screen.

All of the rooms feature 15-foot ceilings, intensifying the openness of the space; floor-to-ceiling windows add to this as well. In the great room and bedrooms, drop-down screens filter or completely block the sun, either automatically or as needed.

The master is on one side of the great room; on the other is the guest bedroom, with a separate bath, also with a jetted tub and shower, and keyed entrance. “It’s great when I have some friends or family staying,” Sawyer said. “They can just come in on their own time. My mom, Malinda, a teacher, spends all her spring breaks here.”

In addition, his kitchen features granite countertops. Adjacent to this is a partition-wall-enclosed office with a built-in desk. Other rooms include a laundry room and a powder room with granite and golden onyx flooring.

“I felt this loft had to have a contemporary style,” said Sawyer, recalling his first consultation with Shields. “I showed her pictures of the style I was looking for, including a few W hotel lobbies that she could model my place after.”

He’s been to a lot of places: Born in Mattoon, Ill., he attended Duke University in North Carolina for his undergraduate degree, then went back home for medical school at the University of Illinois. He completed his internship in internal medicine at UCLA and his dermatology residency at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Said Sawyer: “Arizona is a good state to be a dermatologist, and moving up to Phoenix seemed like a natural progression after training in Tucson. I like the desert living and being close to the West Coast.”

“He wanted his home nicely done ▷





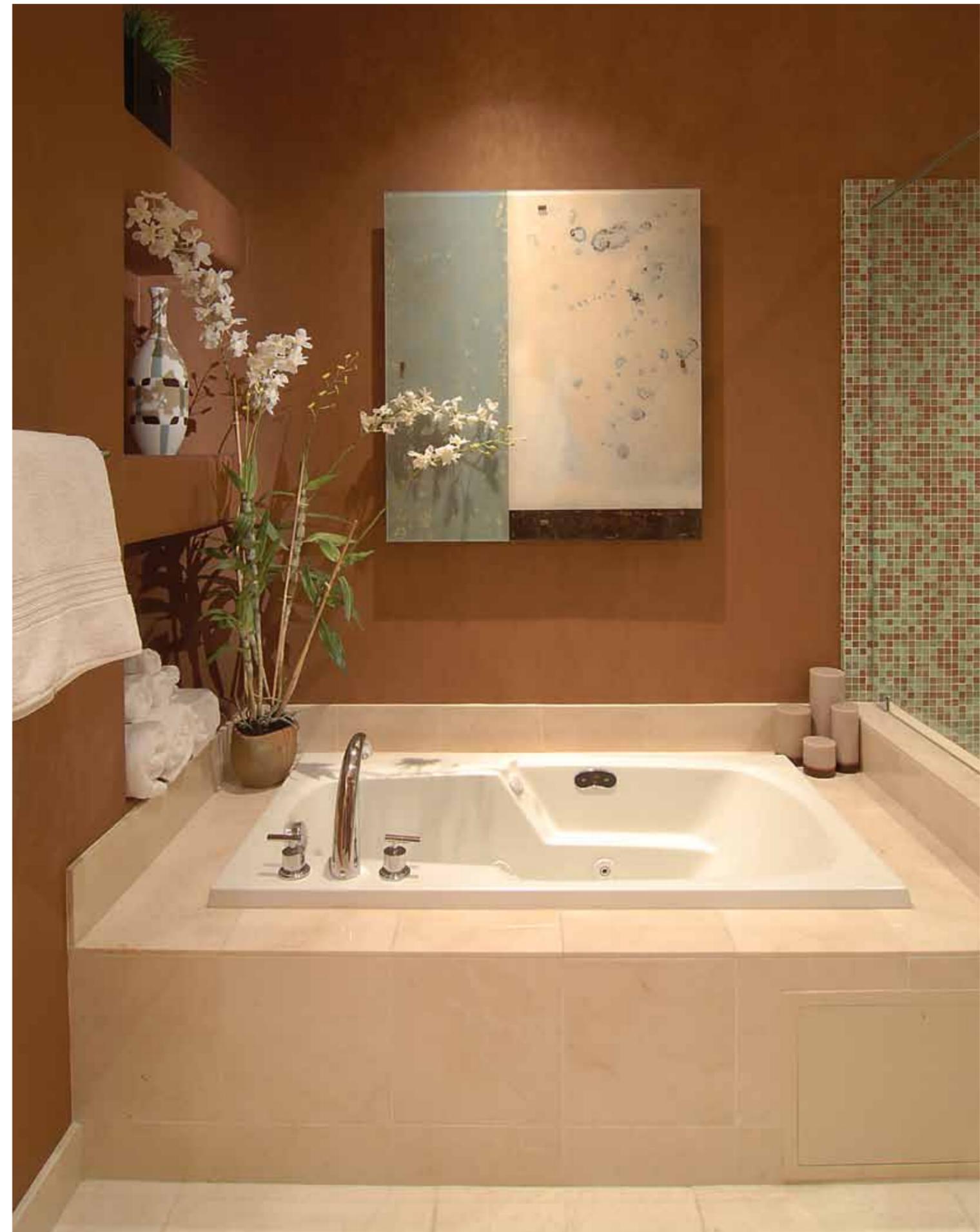
without looking too formal, a place that reflected not only his personal style but his active lifestyle too,” said Shields, who just finished the space this summer.

The first owner, a partner in a well-known legal firm, invested significantly in the space, so most of the finishes and built-ins could be retained. This included the solid wide plank Brazilian cherry flooring; the natural stone floors in the master and guest baths, accented with glass tiles; the wood, glass and steel-accentuated cabinetry; and slab countertops. The powder room is original as well, with its art-glass vessel sink on a Galaxy black granite countertop and caramel onyx floor accented with black granite.

The original owner left the wall-hung console in the great room and a coffee table in the sitting area, and Sawyer’s real estate agent purchased the bar stools at the kitchen counter as a gift for him.

Shields designed the remaining furnishings as well as purchased the artwork. “This was a great opportunity for the homeowner to explore and develop and express his own personal style without any limitations or restrictions to hold him back,” she said.

Much of the original color was yellow – the former resident was the owner’s daughter – so Shields changed the wall colors to deeper tones. In the kitchen and great room, for instance, she chose a deep brick tone, which Sawyer likes, and ▶





in the master, she darkened the ceiling to a deep chocolate tone for more warmth and intimacy.

“He loves a neutral, earth-tone palette. Luckily, they were perfectly suited to complement the beautiful finish materials we inherited,” noted Shields.

The redesigned space includes additions and subtractions. Shields added, for example, the upholstered acoustic wall in the great room to improve the sound quality from the flat-screen television and the speakers hidden behind the covering. Also, in the great room, she scaled back the overhead lighting, redirecting the individual fixtures to accentuate art and furniture groupings. One addition Shields didn’t arrange: Sawyer’s friendly neighbor, Dave, an engineer, is always willing to fix any problems in the condo.

Shields purchased most of the artwork through the Phoenix Art Group, which specializes in original pieces from local artists. Much of the work is contemporary, such as the large patina-on-steel “Nadir” by Volk on the great room wall. However, Sawyer also proudly points to the authentic African shield resting above the master bed headboard.

For him, his loft is high art. “I actually still get excited to walk through the door each night,” he said. “I try never to take it for granted and to make sure to think back to how I felt the first time I saw it.” □