



The living room's dramatic arched windows provide the perfect backdrop for one of the most unique pieces in the home: a C. Bechstein antique grand piano that homeowner Nita Moss purchased in England.



Nita Moss has incorporated her love of both travel and antiques into her home's décor.

A Jewel Box Of A Home

downsizing has never looked this good

BY MELINDA JOHNSTON • PHOTOS BY SCOTT STILES

newly widowed, Juanita ("Nita") Moss made the difficult decision to move from her sizeable south Charlotte condominium, where she had lived for 31 years, to a smaller space in a nearby retirement community. After six years on the waiting list, she received news that a house had become available, and she faced the daunting task of compressing a lifetime's collection of antique furnishings into a new home less than half the size of her condo.

Moss knew the house needed some modifications before she moved, so she assembled a team of experts to help transform the "vanilla box" dwelling into her ideal home. The strategy paid off. Although she ended up having to leave a few items (like her custom carpets) behind due to their size, overall, she was able to tailor the interior of her new home to allow for use and display of favorite items she had collected during her travels around the globe.

John Morgan, owner of Urban Building Group, worked with Moss

to design remodeling plans. She commissioned interior designer Gail Brinn Wilkins, ASID, of Gail Brinn Wilkins Inc., to help make the 2,200-square-foot space luxurious to the last detail.

While the outside footprint of the house remains as it was, interior renovations were extensive. Some areas of the slab-built home were stripped to the dirt to accommodate the changes. Walls were knocked down and floors were ripped up. Pipes were relocated, cabinets were torn out, and plumbing and >



The home is decorated with a mix of formal European furniture and accessories, and comfortable, modern upholstered pieces.

light fixtures were removed. Several special niches were created, water closets were partitioned off, and a new tub and shower were brought in.

Wide-plank hardwood floors supplanted carpet. Floors in the office, laundry room, and kitchen were replaced with white marble tiles accented with black granite tile inlays. Crown molding was added throughout.

What's Old Is Beautifully New Again

Though most of the items that went into the new house came from high-end suppliers, Wilkins was glad to help Moss incorporate favorite elements and fixtures from her former home. There, she had lovingly hung the finest crystal chandeliers, and she saw no reason to leave them behind. Morgan and his staff care-

fully removed the magnificent chandeliers and installed them in various rooms of the new home.

Moss also adored her former living room, a spacious, elegant area decorated with a mix of formal European antiques and comfortable, modern upholstered pieces. The room was highlighted by an arched, columned wall in front of large windows. She decided to create a replica of that room — right down to the wall color and molding style — at half the size.

Morgan built arches in front of windows and French doors, and he mounted Dado molding on the adjacent wall. The room was then painted a light yellow and topped with a gold glaze. The renovations and colors matched the previous room so well that >



Wilkins was able to seamlessly fit Moss' beloved gold draperies, circa 1978, into the mix.

The arched wall provides just the right backdrop for Moss' favorite piece, a C. Bechstein grand piano, discovered and purchased in England and shipped across the Atlantic. The case is covered with a rare gold vernis Martin finish over Louis XVI-style painted scenery. Moss is only the third owner of the antique instrument, and she still plays it occasionally. She considers it a privilege to be the piano's caretaker and, as such, has it professionally tuned three times a year. She also faithfully monitors a dedicated humidifier that ensures the health of the strings and pads.

A French marble-fronted mantel is also a copy of the one original to Moss' former

home. Above the fireplace hangs an imposing *trumeau* she purchased from the Duke Mansion. Although the piece was smoke-damaged when she first saw it, Moss says it attracted her attention. To her delight, after the mirror was cleaned, a picture of two cherubs became visible in the frame above it. Those cherubs, she says, were the inspiration for the original room's design.

Bringing The World Home

Throughout Moss' new home, her love of history, culture, and travel is evident at every turn. A pair of large Chinese rose quartz elephants stands guard at the entrance to the foyer, surveying all who pass, with striking jasper eyes.

The dining room features a mahogany >



One of Nita Moss' more fascinating pieces is a folding knife and fork set said to be the former property of Napoleon Bonaparte.

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The guest bedroom is a fresh combination of cream and lavender.



Favorite pieces of Nita Moss' spectacular cut glass collection sparkle atop kitchen cabinets, enhanced by special display lighting.

china cabinet enjoying its third identity, having been painted blue, then maroon; then finally refinished to its natural state to suit Moss' current décor. The cabinet holds beautiful Royal Crown Derby bone china, which shares space with a curious small folding fork and knife, housed in a velvet-lined leather box, and said to have belonged to Napoleon Bonaparte.

Down the hall, the guest bedroom is decorated in a lovely lavender and cream motif, using furniture and linens Moss already owned. Two twin mattresses, made up separately with crisp, white covers, have been pushed together to create the illusion of one larger bed.

In the master bedroom, the focal point is a canopy bed with European floral print linens. Wilkins recycled the bed, linens, accompanying furniture, lamps, and draperies from



Moss' previous home. Lampshades were the only new additions. In the master bedroom dressing room, a Roman warrior statue stands sentry from his wooden pedestal.

Luxury abounds in the bathrooms, as well. The guest bath boasts marble countertops, Sherle Wagner fixtures with rock crystal knobs, and a gold-accented glass shower. Flanking the mirror are gold sconces and swan towel hooks from Moss' condo.

Moss is comfortably settled in her new home, and the renovated residence appears perfect in every way. However, she acknowledges that she's not quite finished. After all, there are always new places to visit, interesting antiques to discover, and furniture to rearrange. Moss says with a laugh, "I guess my home will always be a work in progress." **TCW**



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