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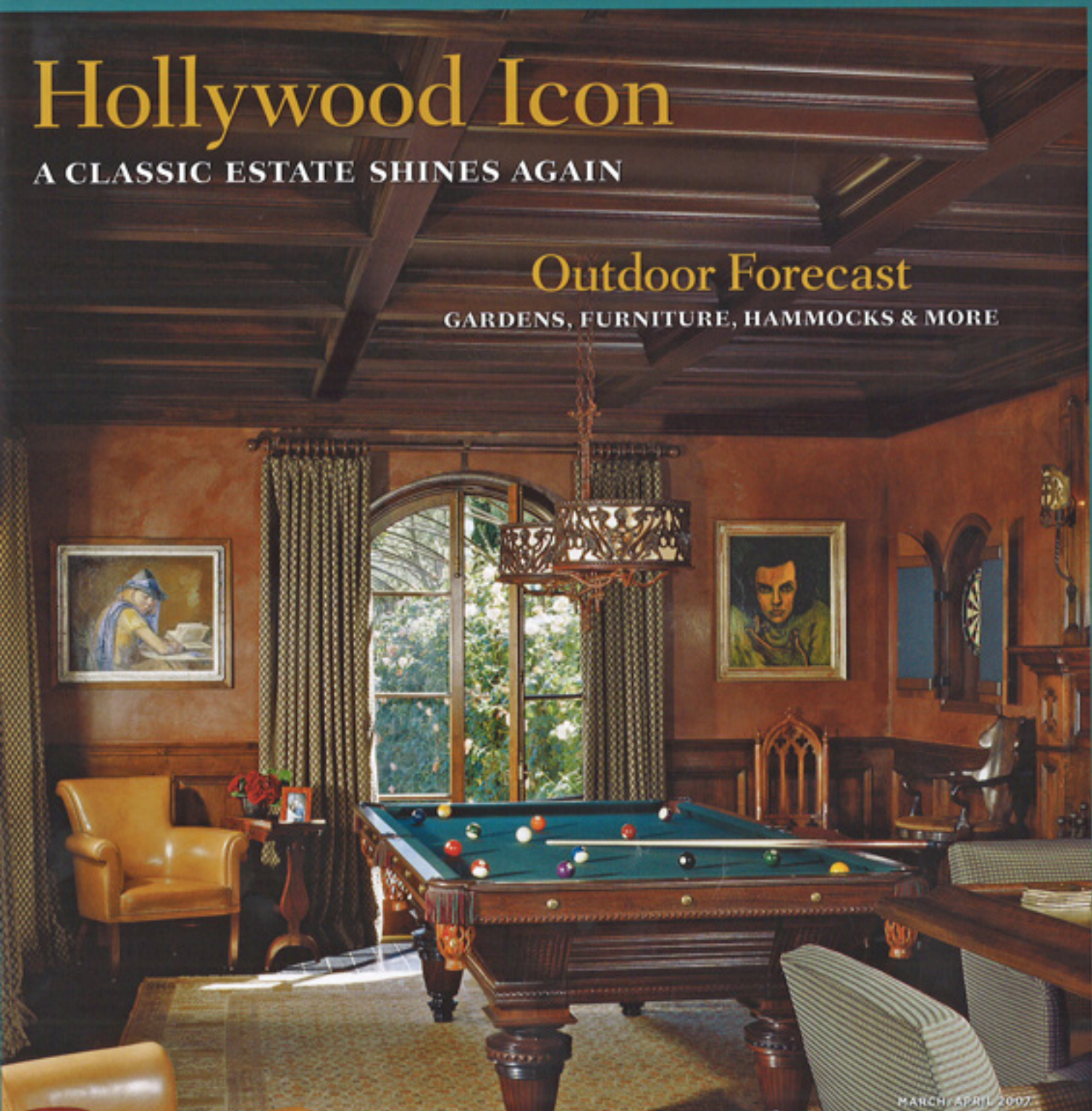
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To Contract and Serve

Taconic Builders takes construction to a new level BY WILLIAM KISSEL



LEFT: PHILLIP ENNIS; DETAIL: PETER LUDWIG



WITH ITS GREEK KEY-FRAMED marble floors, painted plaster moldings and antique Oregon pine library, the Park Avenue apartment of a real estate developer and his family seems to be a perfectly preserved ca. 1915 Upper East Side residence. Look beneath the surface, however, and nothing is as it appears.

The fireplace, for instance, was produced by an architectural craftsman in the basement of his Pennsylvania home using an ancient process known as *scagliola*, whereby plaster is embedded with fine horse-hair strands to mimic the veiny surface of marble. The fanciful moldings are made from the same cast plaster but treated to look like handcrafted marble moldings. All the books in the wood-paneled library are an optical illusion; the detailed plaster panels were made in England to camouflage the room's actual purpose—an entertainment space with a hidden bar at one end, a big-screen TV at the other and, between them, a sophisticated Crestron lighting/audiovisual system that controls the entire 3,000-square-foot home.

Even the authentic Italian marble floor required more than mere marquetry skill. Patterned after the floor in a 12th-century Venetian cathedral, the individual pentagons and squares that make up the central design were mathematically scaled down and water-cut from seven different European marble quarries to fit with precise accuracy into the space. Surprisingly, the intricate Greek-key scroll border is cut from a single piece of marble, while the overall design is so masterfully calculated that the pattern is never off by more than 1/16th of an inch.

All of this detailing was the handiwork of Taconic

A selection of Taconic Builders' projects shows the detail involved in high-end residences: multiple coats of plaster, with the final layer hand-scraped, plaster moldings made to look like marble and paintings accented with gold leaf.



Taconic's full-service menu includes seeking out craftsmen who can replicate moldings, woodwork and masonry and can integrate state-of-the-art technology into historical buildings. In one apartment's study (above), the mirror above the fireplace rises to reveal a concealed television. Other custom touches include solid mahogany doors, intricate plasterwork molds individually sculpted and original flooring restored and hand-finished.

Builders, one of the country's foremost residential builders, which carried out the extensive remodel. "We did a similar floor for another homeowner where the marble was sourced in Italy, cut in Portugal and sent to India, where the pattern was laid out before it was assembled on-site in America," says Vince Tyer, president and CEO of Taconic Builders. "This is fairly routine when you get to this level," he adds, noting that richly detailed, high-end finish work of this magnitude can run between \$500 to \$1,500 per square foot, depending on the scale of the project.

Indeed, luxury homeowners wanting to re-create historically detailed interiors from the past or something original and thoroughly modern no longer rely solely on top architectural firms and interior designers to get the job done. Homeowners sometimes go straight to high-end residential contractors, such as Taconic Builders and Grunow Construction Corporation in the U.S., Holloway White Allom in the U.K. or Hillside Construction des Coteaux in France, who control and manage the work from blueprint to final walkthroughs. Or contractors are brought in from the beginning as part of the design team.

"When clients start researching architects like Robert A.M. Stern, Boris Boronovich or Peter Marino, they see that Taconic was used as the contractor, and more and more they are calling us directly," Tyer says. Clients are often swayed by the company's portfolio: an indoor swimming pool constructed in the former basement of 19th-century Manhattan brownstone, a post-and-beam entertainment space in a New England country estate,

floor-to-ceiling glass walled rooms in a ca. 1970s contemporary home in Chappaqua in Upstate New York and a glass-enclosed greenhouse/breakfast room on the roof of a Central Park South penthouse. The Mamaroneck, N.Y., company has gone from being a \$5 million business with 14 employees in 1999 to a company that currently employs 125 full-time craftsmen and brings in more than \$100 million, and is among a new breed of contractors rewriting the rules of the trade.

"We treat it as a service organization rather than a traditional construction model," says Tyer. As such, Taconic and other upscale residential builders are going far beyond the constraints of typical contractors. They have built up a solid network of highly skilled craftsmen, from framers, plasterers and painters to electricians and plumbers. Or they form strategic alliances with centuries-old firms specializing in custom millwork, stone, masonry and metal fabrication in order to get the work completed properly, on time and, most importantly, on budget.

"Construction is still thought of as a commodity, but we're trying to change that by focusing on the resumes of our craftspeople," says Tyer, noting that potential clients are given the builder's and its artisans' resumes upfront as part of the contractor selection process. Every job has a designated site manager, who works directly with individual craftsmen and, in lieu of an architect, is empowered to make necessary design and construction decisions. Likewise, the firm maintains cordial relationships with building owners, especially crucial with New York's white-glove co-ops, which allow residential construction only during summer months.

Such hands-on building often eliminates construction delays and cost overruns, but it doesn't mean every home remodel is problem-free. For example, when Taconic was asked to construct a recessed alcove to accommodate a headboard in the master bedroom of the Park Avenue apartment they recently finished, the custom-made four-poster bed seemed to be dwarfed in the precisely measured space. Turns out the Belgian furniture maker created a full-size bed instead of a standard queen. The problem was quickly resolved with the construction of a new bed, and for once, no one could blame it on the contractor.



OPPOSITE PAGE AND TOP DETAIL, PHILIP ENNIS; RIGHT AND BOTTOM DETAIL, GERRY HOLBROOK; MIDDLE DETAIL, PETER LUDWIG

Taconic Builders, 941.698.7456, www.taconicbuilders.com