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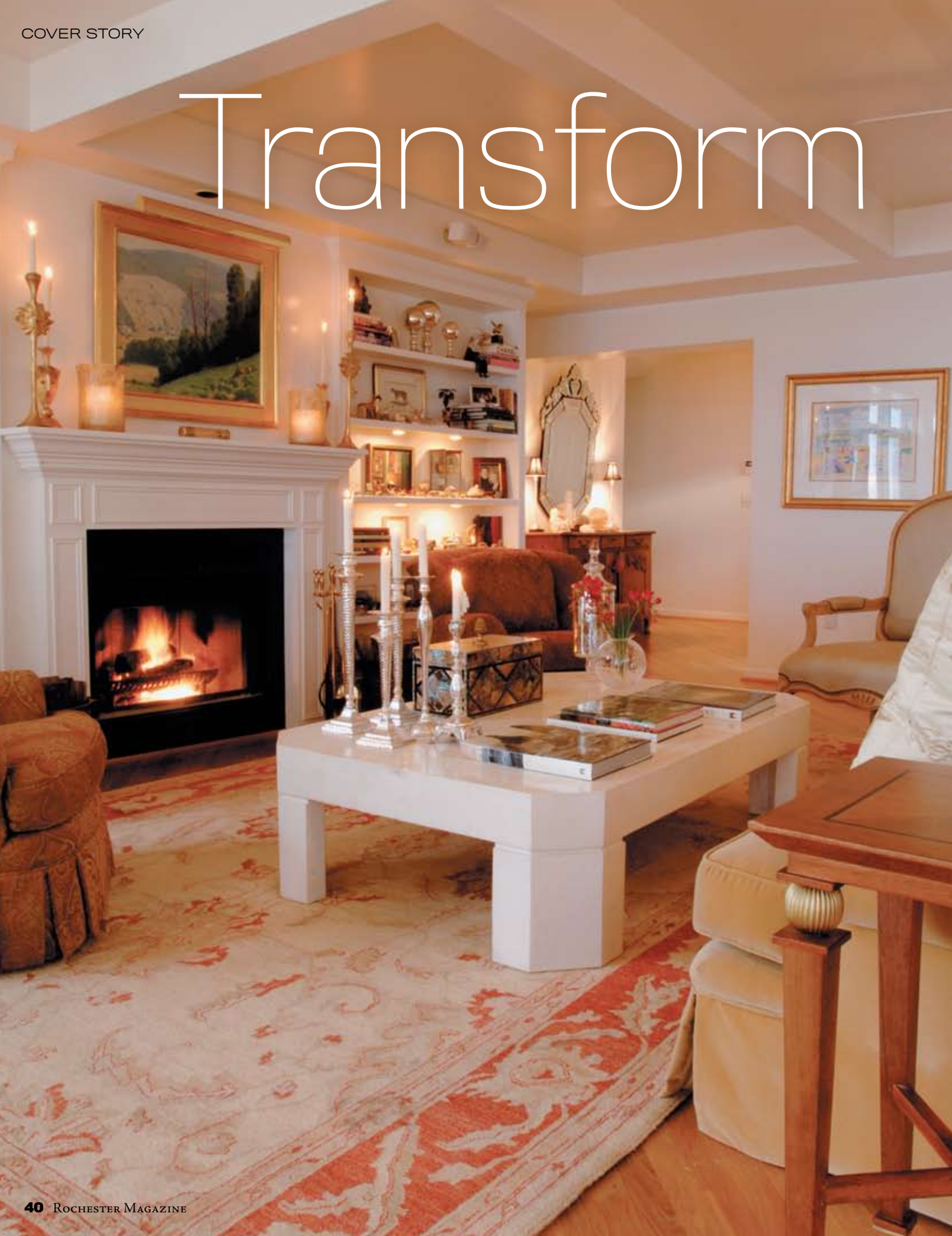
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Transform



your home



Interior designer Arthur Vitoch has a summer house and winter house—in the same house. Here's how he does it.

STORY BY ERICH VAN DUSSEN
PHOTOS BY MATT WITTMAYER

Arthur Vitoch mentions the word “change” with the frequency and passion of a political candidate—and he actually backs it up with tangible results for his constituency. Of course, as one of Rochester’s premier interior designers, invoking and implementing the concept of change is all part of the job.

And Vitoch brings the concept home with him, as well. Twice a year, the owner of Vitoch Interiors, Ltd., embarks on a ritual that transforms the main living space in his 2,900-square-foot Irondequoit lakefront house from a cozy winter retreat to a bright, summer-infused beach house and back again—without picking up a paintbrush or rearranging furniture.

The room itself doesn’t change; and yet, it does. Modifications are all on the surface, carefully planned and utterly effective. Not even the bound volumes on his living room shelves are immune. Vitoch makes clever use of judging a book by its cover, using color-coordinated sets as part of his seasonal transformations.

Before the design took shape, the house itself needed attention. “It’s gone through lots of changes,” Vitoch says of



WINTER WARMTH. The glow of light from candles and the fireplace brings a cozy feeling. Swapping in pillows with rusts and reds helps bring “heat” to the room when it’s cold outside.



ALMOST AL FRESCO. Floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the back deck and landscaping bring the outdoors in during summer months.

“More crystal and glass; more flowers, more greenery. It all makes a big difference.”



SUMMER COOL. White slip covers and books with colorful covers shine in the natural light which floods the room through large windows overlooking the Lake Ontario.

the sprawling two-bedroom house that he bought in 1985 and moved into full-time five years ago. “Originally it was a true beach house: I used to literally paint the floor on my way out at the end of each season.”

Renovations over the years have been ongoing and plentiful—there’s work going on right now in some rooms—but when Vitoch and his partner Margi Weggeland sold their East Avenue carriage house to become year-round lake residents, they quickly realized they wanted to make additional, subtler adjustments.

The look, he says, “was too cold, especially in the winter when you’re looking out those windows and the lake is blustery. We knew we had to make some changes if we wanted to feel comfortable here all the time.”

Turning a New England-style cottage into something akin to a ski lodge is no small feat. The winterizing (Vitoch’s term) entails the integration of different colors, an Oriental rug, new accent pieces, and paintings and artwork with warmer tones and frames.

“Creams and reds lend themselves to a warmer place,” he says. “It really is amazing what you can do with just a



few splashes of color.”

The visual shift continues outside, as well. In winter, the nighttime view of Lake Ontario becomes “a black hole,” Weggeland says. “It’s not like Canandaigua, where you can look across the lake and see lights.” Their remedy was a large tree limb, bedecked with strings of bee lights and added in place of the deck table’s seasonally dormant patio umbrella. “It adds a really beautiful effect,” she says.

Vitoch and Weggeland first had a go at winterization in 2004, shortly before her grown children were to arrive for Thanksgiving. The kids had visited previously, Vitoch recalls, but “suddenly they saw this house they had never seen before. With the candles and the glowing fire, I think they were really amazed.”

Achieving that look is now an autumnal tradition. Then, come each spring, hibernation ends and the summer home returns. Now, for the warm season, a slipcover has turned the straw-colored overscale Lawson sofa into an opulent expanse of white, and a rug dominated by cobalt blue has replaced fall and winter’s rust-and-gold Oriental.

“We change the pillows and the



CLEVER COLOR. Directly off the back rooms, Vitoch uses the same white and cobalt blue on the deck, giving a sense that the inside room extends outside.

Do try this at home

Consider this a quick consultation from a professional interior designer. Arthur Vitoch offers these ideas to anyone interested in a residential transformation similar to the ones he puts his house through twice a year.

“It can be really easy to do,” Vitoch says. “You can change the feeling of a room just by changing the pillows: You can have bright jewel tones (primary colors) for summer and then change them to deeper, warm colors—rusts and reds—for the winter.” Even something as simple as a colorful throw on the back of a chair, he adds, can offer eye-popping results.

Vitoch highly recommends slipcovers, though he knows they’re not for everyone. “Many of our clients—maybe more than not—don’t like slipcovers, but they really come in handy. Many furniture manufacturers now will sell slipcovers along with a sofa or chair. And they’re all washable fabrics,” he notes, speaking as the owner of two dogs.

“We could never have a white sofa in here—it would have to be recovered every season,” Vitoch says. “But a slipcover is a good way to have a light-colored sofa whenever you want one.”

With window treatments, the type you choose can create alternating effects in a room. “Beautiful treatments can dress up ordinary windows and make a room look more finished,” he says. “Drapes are cozy—they add a warm dimension to the room. Something hard, like shutters or blinds, certainly add a distinctive look that can be very different.”

Above all, Vitoch encourages, don’t be shy about trying something new.

“Some people would never think of doing that. They set the room, and that’s the way it’s going to be forever,” he says. “But it’s fun to rearrange things sometimes. It can make you look at your home in a different way.”

— *Erich Van Dussen*

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accessories, and we put out more summery blue things,” he says. “More crystal and glass; more flowers, more greenery. It all makes a big difference.” (Off-season materials are typically kept in a warehouse at Vitoch’s University Avenue store or in the storage space in a guesthouse next door. “A lot of people have basements. We don’t.”)

That emphasis on cobalt blue isn’t accidental. The same hue is present in the patio furniture, separated from the living room by only a few square yards of hardwood floor and a wall of floor-to-ceiling windows that offer a picturesque perspective of the Charlotte pier. With the interior shade matching that of the exterior furnishings, “it creates the sense of a much larger room, stretching out to the deck,” Vitoch says. “A very airy feeling.”

The living room bookcase is also lightened up for summer, including the aforementioned exchange of dark-colored books for brighter-jacketed volumes.

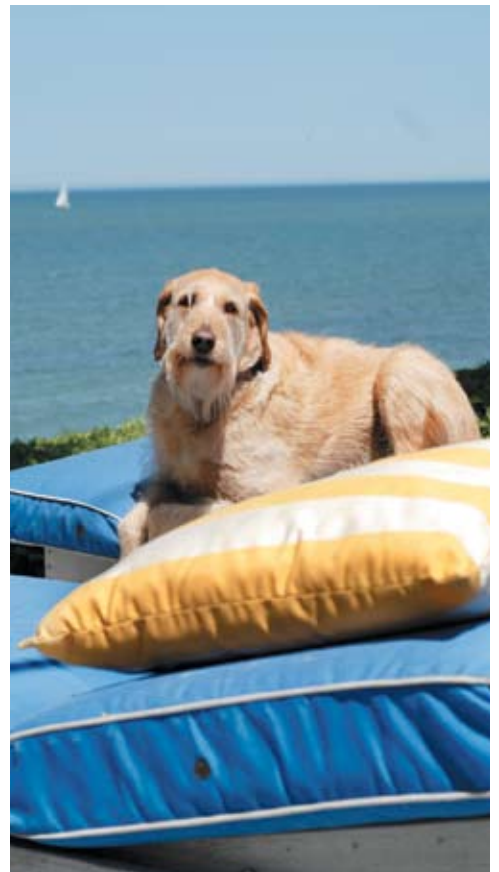
“We have a lot of books, and it’s nice to be able to put them all out at

different times of year,” Vitoch says. “Nothing is just for show—I believe in using things. For instance, the [slipcover] is completely washable, which is a good thing, because our dogs are always on the furniture,” he says with a laugh. That would be Nora and Maggie, a Wheaten Terrier and a Labradoodle, whose friendly demeanors come at a cost: the kind of hair that would vex any owner of traditional white furniture.

Vitoch and Weggeland’s house was featured in the locally produced coffee-table book *Great Homes of Rochester and the Finger Lakes*, but the reward for their efforts is more personal.

“I like being able to experience a different feeling when you walk into the house,” he says. “It’s nice to have that kind of change.” Evoking the notion one last time, he sounds again like the world’s most soft-spoken politician—except in Vitoch’s case, his actions speak louder than his words.

Freelance writer Erich Van Dussen lives in Rochester.



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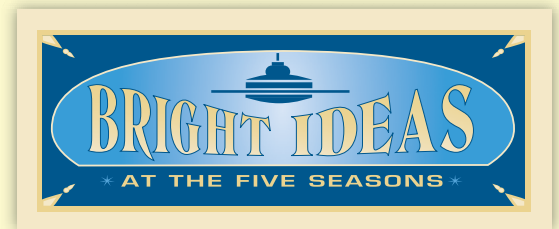
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