

SOPHISTICATED LIVING

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A ROOM WITH A VIEW

Several, actually.

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Thirty-three stories up, surrounded by outdoor seating areas to catch the sun rising or setting, located within steps of prime attractions, Jim and Janet Ayers call this luxurious, custom penthouse in the downtown high-rise building, the Viridian, home.

Commissioning artists from one end of the state to the other, employing local craftsmen and buying locally-sourced materials, they meticulously turned three units into one multi-level, world-class home that in all ways reflects their love of Tennessee and their longstanding practice of sharing their blessings.

Jim. Ayers' "had-to-have" design feature was a grand, sweeping spiral staircase visible as you cross the threshold. Building and installing this master staircase was the first order of business in a very tight construction schedule. It represented a big but not insurmountable challenge to the seasoned professional team of architect Scott Wilson and builder Craig Huseby. To the Ayers, the staircase represents the marriage of a traditional

dwelling to a contemporary urban one. In a home filled with symbolism, I can't help but think that graceful steady ascent also represents their lives.

The Ayers are known as an ultra-successful, ultra-philanthropic couple. For approximately 33 years Jim has been the chairman and sole shareholder of one of the state's most successful local banks, FirstBank, which went public this past September. Janet, a healthcare leader and important board member in several arenas, is the president of the family's charitable organization, The Ayers Foundation. The Ayers Foundation is "dedicated to improving the quality of life for the people of Tennessee in the fields of education, conservation, and social welfare." Recently, the foundation made the single biggest donation to Belmont University in the school's 125 year history. Jim and Janet appear to live a glamorous life but appearances doesn't tell the full story of the "Tennessee core values" that ground this kind, authentic and loyal duo.





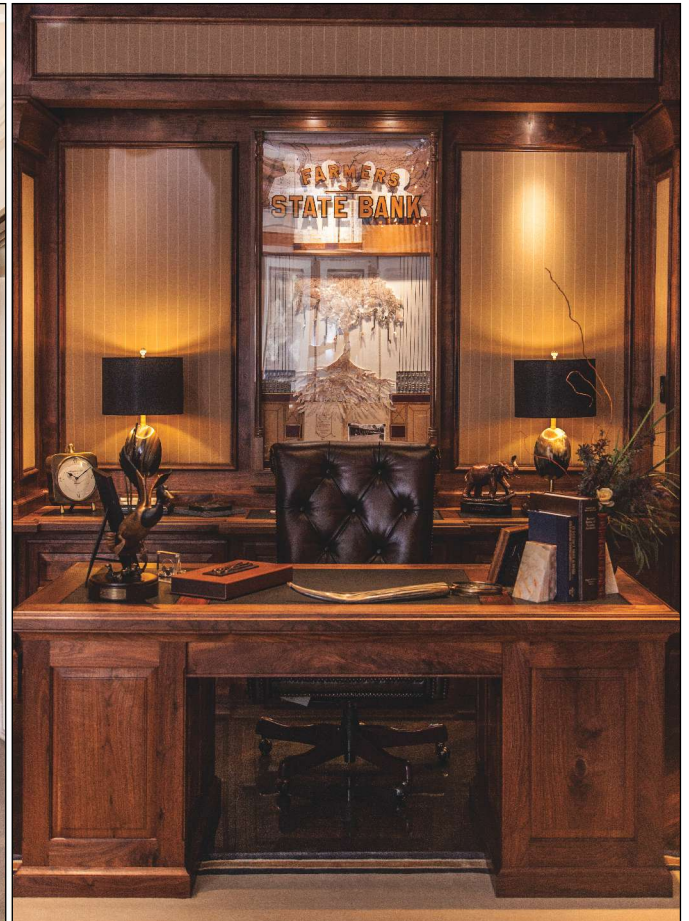
Jim and Janet were intentional with every aspect of constructing and adorning their new home to reflect these values. “No matter how successful you are, you have to have deep roots in your community, friends, family, and faith,” said Janet. “The winds will blow and times will get tough. Deep roots will sustain you.”

The Ayers’ roots are deep and their beginnings humble. Jim grew up the son of a saw miller in rural west Tennessee, where streams and fields were his country club and skipping school to fish and hunt were his passions. He proudly displays his first gun, given to him by his father, in a collection of thoughtfully crafted firearms in his home office. Proof of hunting prowess abounds among other acquisitions from world travel like white jade from China. Custom wall coverings, leather trimmed drapes and a family crest-bearing-carpet indicating French ancestry, all make Jim’s work space smashing. The true focal point of the office, however, is a multi media piece by artist Denise Stewart Sanabria created from an original teller’s window from FirstBank. Behind the glass are cutouts of Jim and colleagues, perhaps, reflecting the role of a team in excellent customer service. Denise, being so versatile, was also asked to replicate favorite travel photos using

vanilla and caramel colored paints on silk panels, which hang in the professional wing hall.

Just down the hall, Janet’s workspace is a stylish and feminine tribute to her childhood and professional life. Artist April Street captured on canvas Janet’s pink-dogwood-lined driveway from her childhood home, while innovative sculptor John Petrey recreated Janet’s mother’s favorite dress in a life-size aluminum sculpture. The colors aqua and pink symbolize Janet’s mother and grandmother and are cleverly used in juxtaposition with white items such as her fabulous leather and gem-studded office chair.

Juxtaposition was a key part of a decorative style Janet and dear friend Cherie Grisham used. They purposely set about creating spaces that were “sexy comfortable” and “comfortably sexy.” Either way, the product is a masterful mix of lights and darks, masculine and feminine, traditional and modern. And even though Janet had any interior designer in the world only a phone-call away, she instead solicited Cherie to accompany her on this one-of-a-kind design adventure. Janet had a desire to have an “experience” with someone who’s excellent taste often mirrored her own. Choosing a friend over a pro is rare and lovely; and exemplifies Janet’s desire to stay rooted to friends and to share her blessings.











As it turned out, “Cherie was one of the strongest members of the team throughout construction,” said architect Scott Wilson. “Often, she sat in on weekly team meetings with dust all over her.” With only 10 months to gut, merge and complete, and only eight days after that to decorate, most would think the pressure would have affected the quality of work and bond of relationships. “Not so,” said builder Craig Huseby. “Janet Ayers knows how to put a vision before people and get them to believe that they can accomplish it. She knows how to get her hands dirty, to sacrifice, to work alongside you. She is a true servant leader.” The admiration goes both ways. Janet raved that Huseby Homes has always been “on time and on budget” while giving “concierge-level service.” She also noted that Scott delivered “functionality that is as exceptional as the design.”

One of the best moments of the project for Scott was when found extra height that had been hidden by a drop down ceiling in Janet’s closet. He was ecstatic to share with her that he could deliver an unheard of three-story closet, something had not asked for but was thrilled to hear about. They brought the idea to Jim who quickly and jokingly surmised that his wife would need more shoes to fill the space - amazing stilettos being a key element of her personal style. The closet is nothing short of dreamy: white

with lighted cabinets to display her favorite bags, Jimmy Choos, Louboutins and partitions to divide special dresses by event. Yet, her most meaningful item on display is her Bible. Her closet reflects what’s on her outside. Her Bible reflects her inside.

The art chosen for the closet suits the space, pun intended. Liana Velez’s exotic and cheeky piece might have been chosen because of the client’s and artist’s love of shoes. Liana and Janet are collaborating on a custom piece for a Jimmy Choo event to benefit the Nashville Symphony. The Ayers are such big supporters of the symphony that they commissioned modern day impressionist Brett Weaver to paint them playing stringed instruments under Maestro Giancarlo Guerrero’s instruction. Another great Weaver piece hangs over the television in the library. It depicts one of the original FirstBank branches in downtown Nashville not far from their penthouse.

Adjacent to the library is a cozy eat-in kitchen nook with a divine abstract mural, drips of muted greens and neutrals by renowned muralist and fine artist Nicole Zules. It provides the perfect backdrop for conversation over food. I got to witness this as Jim ended the evening in this intimate dining spot sharing takeout with Scott and Craig. It was nice for me to see this hardworking man enjoying his apartment with the men who helped build it.





Throughout this penthouse, there are many references to roots and trees. Walnut wood is used as a building material and several art pieces made out of wood. Ed Nash's painting of trees hangs in Jim's closet above a framed photo of grandson Jay. Another of Nash's works "Smokies" is in Janet's office. While daughter Katie and grandbaby Eloise are depicted as apples in the tree in a Lisa Moore. Christine Patterson's ethereal encaustic tree is soothing in the master suite area. And artist Brad Sells provides a stunning carved bowl as well as life-size carved sculptures of Janet and Jim in an embrace.

Also important to the Ayers is a Mandy Rogers Horton painting that documents the beauty of light replicating crystal chandeliers. Two bold blue abstracts by Edie Maney, and a soothing atmospheric by Emily Leonard in the master bedroom provide contrast. A special book by Jerry Parks, photographer and brilliant southern storyteller, provides a narrative for the couple's 10th anniversary. It beautifully chronicles Janet and Jim's love story as well as the idea behind the artwork they collect.

But among all the pieces, and there are many in this well-appointed space, there is one that reigns supreme. Janet and Cherie

always knew that Leiper's Fork gallery owner and artist David Arms would be commissioned to create a piece that would be the genesis of the whole art collection as David is renown for depicting the Last Supper with birds. Birds have a special significance for Janet. "When I was a little girl, my grandmother, a school teacher, used to tell me a story out of her primer about a little old lady in a black shiny dress, red bonnet and white apron. The old woman was unwilling to help others and therefore, was turned into a woodpecker, relegated to a life of pecking for food." The piece by Arms depicts Jesus as a white dove and all the disciples as sparrows eating the supper off of Janet's grandmother's aqua and pink china. David depicted Judas as a woodpecker as both the woman-turned-woodpecker in the story and Judas disregard the teachings of Jesus. No wonder this piece, as impactful in scale as it is in meaning, was designed for the heart of this home, the kitchen. The kitchen is where food, family, friends gathering, roots, core values and faith all merge. And although the word REMEMBER is emblazoned across the bottom of the painting, the Ayers aren't likely to forget the values of faith, love, and responsibility the painting represents. 