

FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS

This is the true story of two couples who chose to live in one condo building and open their world to design. Find out what happens when neighbors stop being polite and start influencing each other's interior choices. Sam Shelton and Jeff Fabian introduced their friends, Emory Bevill and Chris Holt, to the wonders of modern design. We check in on their real world.

STEERING CLEAR! *One couple comes to mid-century modern design by way of gloss, glamour and a whole lot of guidance*

BY KAREN SOMMER SHALETT | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIK JOHNSON

"We're not serial flippers," protest Emory Bevill and Chris Holt. It's just that the two, a deputy CFO at a federal regulatory agency and an owner of a public affairs firm and real estate investor, can't bring themselves to pass up an opportunity. And in the last five years, the couple has seen as many great deals. A quintet of homes with Bevill's and Holt's decorative touch dot the downtown DC and Delaware coastal landscapes, but their latest pied-à-terre at SoLo Piazza, a Logan Circle condominium, was less about market value and more about the value of friendship.

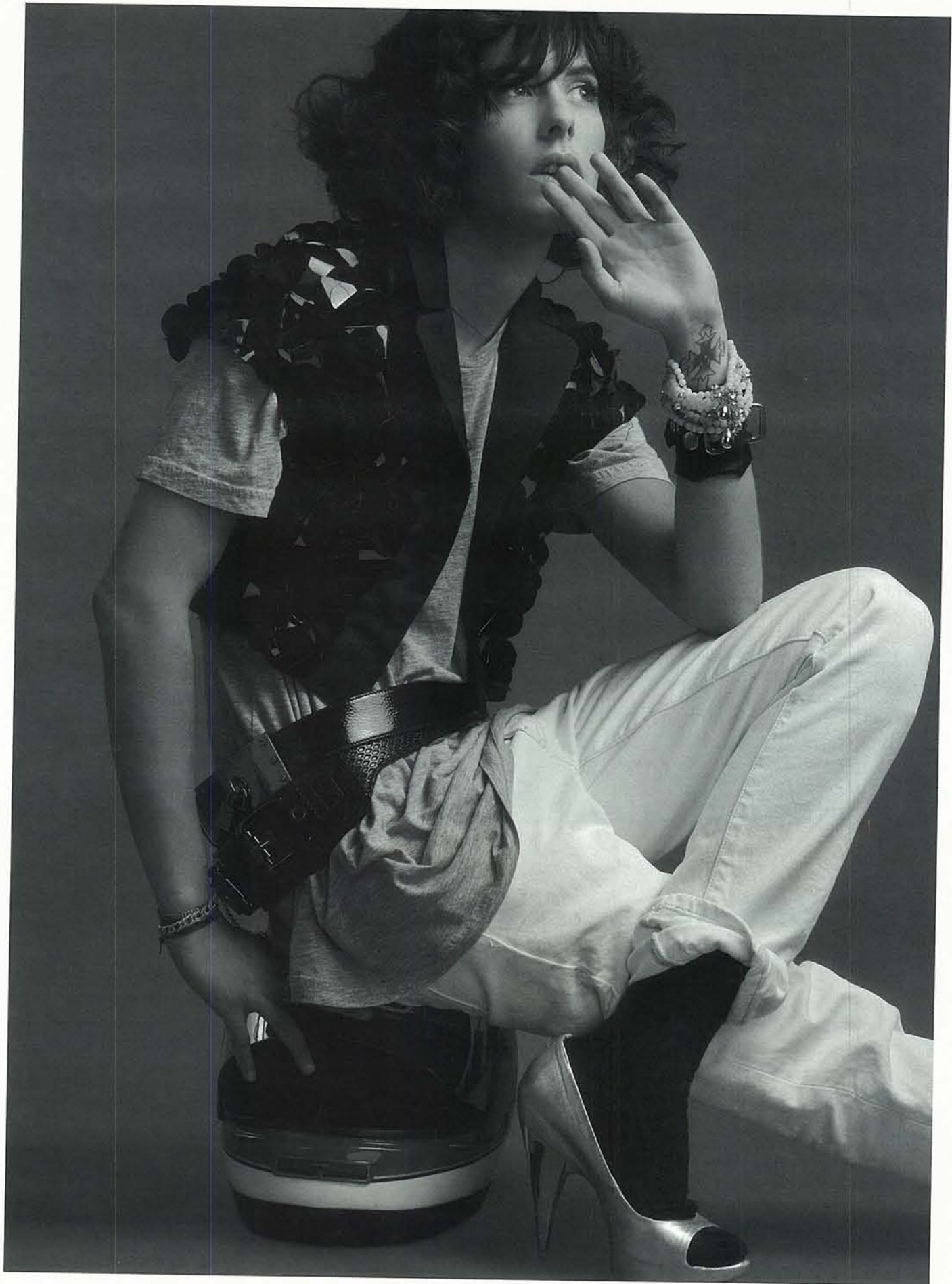
The love affair with artist/developer/restaurateur Giorgio Furiioso's über-modernist high-rise started out casually. Bevill and Holt would visit the penthouse for dinner. It was graphic designers' Sam Shelton and Jeff Fabian who they were coming to see. But soon, details such as the exterior's mix of dozens of different materials and the building's

concave architecture caught the couple's artistic eye. That their hosts, and very best friends, were the first to sign for their own condo in the nine-story building didn't hurt. Shelton and Fabian had been influencing Bevill and Holt's design-related decisions for years, so it seemed natural to follow their lead.

"We've never sought their approval," says Bevill. "But it was through osmosis that they taught us so much."

The Savannah-born Bevill first dipped his toe into the seemingly tumultuous waters of modern design after meeting Shelton at the Capital Rowing Club. Shelton and his partner Fabian immediately began shopping, dining and soon vacationing with Bevill, with Holt joining them several years later.

It was these outings that first exposed Bevill to a modernist aesthetic. There was something about the simple and sculptural





GETTING IN ON THE GROUND FLOOR: Sworn modernists Sam Shelton and Jeff Fabian introduced friends Emory Bevill and Chris Holt to standards such as the Barcelona chair and Saarinen table. They took it from there, to gloss it up with a glamour-heavy treatment. *Opposite:* The water wall in the courtyard of Gio Ponti Furioso's SoLo Piazza, sits outside Bevill and Holt's first floor condo. The couples were attracted to the building because of the architectural elements by Bill Bonstra of Bonstra/Haresign Architecture. Their love of Furioso's work was contagious and their best friends, Emory Bevill and Chris Holt, later purchased a unit on the first floor.



Above: Bevill constantly edits Holt's desire to "see an empty space and figure out what would fit there."
Opposite: Modernist standouts like the Flight recliner and Platner table get fresh treatments.

"The formal sitting area looks like 1930s Hollywood designer Billy Haines had his way with it, rather than two novices with a first look at the Design Within Reach catalog."

elements of the design theory that appealed to his love of symmetry and order. It was clear that he'd fully processed his friends aesthetic the day he and Holt gifted them with a decoupage alphabet plate by John Derian. Unbeknownst to Bevill and his partner, the graphic artist who often uses text in his designs was a favorite of their friends. Now, many years later, Shelton and Fabian still have it on display.

"The names of designers became part of the vernacular," Bevill says. "And I learned why the Barcelona chair is so significant."

For Holt, who has a love of baroque, theatrical and filled-to-the-gills spaces, the gravitational pull to minimalism took a little more time. It was for their third home together that Holt found inspiration in Celeste Cooper's interior designs at the Boston hotel 15 Beacon. A mix of dark woods and stainless steel paved the way for the transition from Holt's traditional digs to a far more streamlined aesthetic. The coupling was so successful that a buyer purchased the Connecticut Avenue expanse, along with nearly everything in it. Holt and Bevill

stopped the sale just short of the artwork and juice glasses.

The couple says that the building itself fit into a major reason they decided to relocate after such a short time in their former space. "It took awhile to figure out what we wanted," says Holt. "There is a more intimate lifestyle here, where we have cocktails with two or three couples—not formal dinners in the big dining room that we had."

The oversized sofa that had sat un-sat-upon has been replaced by four of Mies Van der Rohe's most ubiquitous pieces, but in a less predictable fashion. Covered in white leather and ringed around a Platner coffee table, the formal sitting area looks like 1930s Hollywood designer Billy Haines had his way with it, rather than two novices with a first look at the Design Within Reach catalog. Just as savvy is the treatment of the equally omnipresent Saarinen Tulip table. Set with blonde sculptural chairs by Norman Cherner, a furniture designer working in the 1940s and '50s, the look is unexpectedly fresh.

Bevill and Holt, now fully immersed in the Bauhaus and mid-







century modern aesthetics, constantly act as each other's editors.

"I like a lot of negative space," says Bevill. Holt interrupts: "I see an empty space and figure out what would fit there."

As with any couple, compromises abound. But in each case, it seems the real winner is the space. Holt's love of extra seating, small occasional tables and accessories have been expressed in Lucite: two Peekaboo consoles, Phillippe Starck's Louis Ghost armchairs and a few stackable Luisa side tables. The clear material makes the space less

Above: Ethiopian artist Elsa Gebreyesus' *Vibrations* painting hangs as a point of color in the couple's otherwise neutral bedroom. **Opposite:** Like their friends, Bevill and Holt love Furioso's art-filled signature public spaces. The lobby is Bevill and Holt's version of curb appeal.

cluttered-looking and more glamorous at the same time. For his part, Bevill agreed to an asymmetrical floor plan, but brought symmetry to the space by using multiples of a few pieces throughout.

And luckily for them both, they have a manse in Lewes, Delaware that is chockablock with all the things this space is not. Used as their country house, the three-acre grounds, in which Bevill weeds and toils just about every weekend, contrasts with the small condo courtyard the couple accesses (their unit is on the first floor). The water wall that drips and splashes just beyond the den—and the serenity it brings—was the final selling point.

"Outside these floor-to-ceiling glass windows is just an extension of our space," says Bevill. "No one is ever in the courtyard, so it has become our own oasis to sit and entertain in."

And now it is Bevill and Holt who host Shelton and Fabian, undoubtedly teaching them a thing or two. ■

