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November 2007

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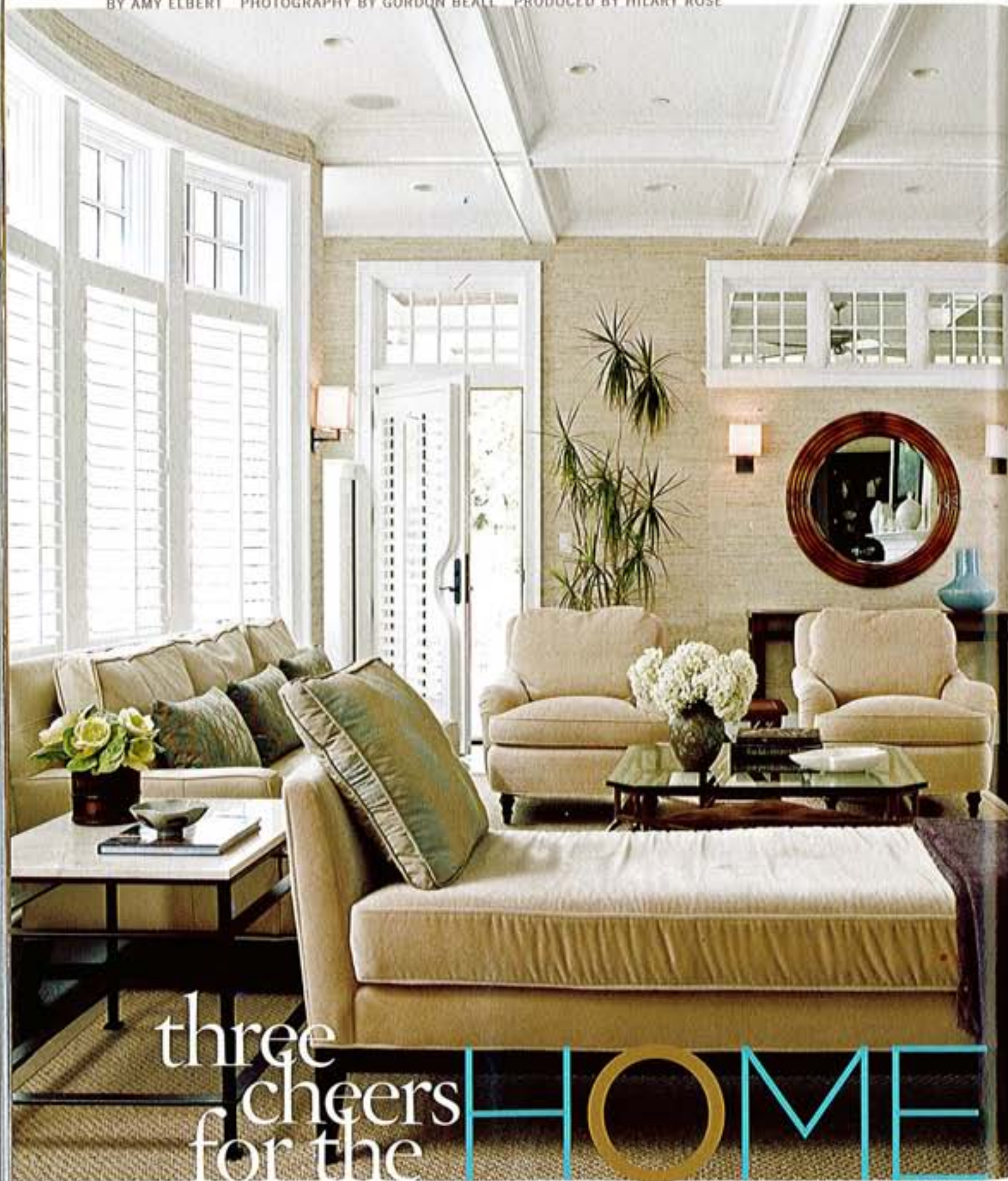
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Kristie Edwards would rather be outside playing ball with her family, but she also enjoys hanging out with them and watching television in their comfortable living room. (When not being viewed, the TV, set into the wall above the fireplace, is concealed behind a roll-down painting.)

three
cheers
for the

HOME TEAM

A CHICAGO COUPLE COVERS THE BASES

FOR FAMILY AND FUN.



Kristie Edwards: Baseball fan, school founder, kid magnet, puppy trainer, lover of light, and full-time mom.

Baseball and big hearts brought Kristie and Mike Edwards together. The then 20-somethings were recent college graduates when they met as coaches of opposing Little League teams near Chicago's infamous (and since demolished) Cabrini-Green housing project. "I was the only female coach," Kristie says, and Mike was "very involved" in the organization. "The boys [on the teams] were the ones who introduced us."

Mike was selling insurance and Kristie was in sales at The Merchandise Mart, but they dedicated nearly all their after-work hours to mentoring the 9- to 12-year-old boys, most from one of Chicago's toughest neighborhoods. "We were broke, but we took them out for pizza and snacks," Kristie says. "We practically lived at the field."

Even after they were married, Mike and Kristie remained close to several of the kids; three of them were attendants at their wedding. "The boys just stayed in our lives," says Kristie. Fifteen years later—blessed with financial success—she and Mike continue to share their time, money, hearts, and even their home with various young people.

Parents of three children of their own—Jackson, 11, Kate, 9, and Clay, 6, plus two dogs—the Edwardses' lives are plenty busy. Kristie is a full-time mom and Mike, after retiring as an options trader, coaches at Chicago Hope Academy, a private school the couple helped found. Most nights the family expands to include their children's friends and high school students attending Chicago Hope. Two boys live with the family during

the school week, benefiting from Mike and Kristie's attention and guidance. "We're trying to expose them to a different way of life and opportunities," Kristie says. "We correct their manners, get them to bed at certain times, and have them pitch in with chores. They are part of the family."

In 2004, Kristie and Mike were living in a developer-built house on a typical 25-foot-wide Chicago lot. When friends told them about a 50-foot-wide lot for sale in the quiet residential Ravenswood neighborhood, they jumped at the chance to build a city house that would nurture their close family.

The couple found their soul mate in Chicago architect Fred Wilson, who enthusiastically embraced the couple's vision for a light-filled, family-centered house. Rather than a conventional floor plan—formal living and dining rooms at the front of the house and a kitchen/great room at the back—Wilson incorporated inviting family-hangout spaces throughout. "I wanted to really live in the whole house, and I wanted everyone else to feel like they could, too," Kristie says.

After a year of planning, construction began in September 2005. The 5,500-square-foot house is technically a four-level

Right: A 17½-foot-high ceiling in the music room/library on the third level (above the garage) is grounded by a quartet of leather recliners. *Above left:* A stacked stone fireplace in the front hall backs up to a second fireplace in the living room. The two fireplaces share a flue. *Above right:* Squat columns and an angled bay window add quirky details to the traditional house, says architect Fred Wilson.





Above: The counter between the kitchen and dining area is where the Edwards children do homework and crafts. Below left: To minimize clutter in the kitchen, the microwave and a coffee machine for the coffee-loving Mike were built into a column. Below right: A relaxed dining area in lieu of a formal dining room is designed for family entertaining. Doors to the left of the open French doors conceal a computer workstation.



Stone floors, marble and subway-tile backsplashes, coffered ceilings, and custom-made cabinets give the kitchen a vintage character appropriate to the house's established neighborhood. Left: The large built-in refrigerator can be difficult for youngsters to open, Kristie says, so she keeps breakfast foods and snacks in three refrigerator drawers and a freezer drawer in the island. Two dishwashers ease cleanup for the active family of five—plus guests.





Jackson Edwards ties his shoe on the garage-and-mudroom level of the split staircase. Windows stacked three high on the north-facing stair wall flood the core of the house with light.
Opposite: A wall of windows in the sunroom, which opens onto the kitchen and dining area, gives Kristie a perfect vantage point to watch the children playing outdoors while she takes a minute to have coffee and read the paper.



split (plus finished basement and attic home office) in traditional disguise. The main living area is bisected by a hall leading from the front door to the kitchen. "When you come in the front entry, you're looking all the way through to the kitchen window," the architect says. "We tried to create vistas throughout the house."

On one side of the hall is the living room, which functions more as a family room where Mike and Kristie often gather with the children in the evenings to watch television. The flat-panel TV is mounted above the fireplace and is concealed when not in use by a painting that rolls over the television screen.

Interior designer Nancy Bernstein furnished the living room with chenille-upholstered chairs and a cream-colored leather sofa—pretty enough to win Kristie's approval yet able to stand up to a household of youngsters and two dogs. To strengthen the chenille and other upholstery fabrics, Bernstein reinforced them with a knit backing. "The house had to work for their family—be durable, low maintenance, and inviting," she says.

The 50-foot-wide city lot allowed for flourishes such as a dramatic split staircase across from the living/family room with a wall of windows that floods the house with sunlight. "The wide lot allowed us to have a stairwell on one side and a big living room on the other," Wilson explains.

Another architectural highlight is a limestone fireplace in the front hall. "It sort of became the cross axis of the whole house," Wilson says. "You enter and here's this fireplace that spikes through the center of the house."



Dark-stained hardwood floors in much of the house contrast with super-white walls, a color Kristie insisted on. "I typically paint walls an off-white," Bernstein says. "Fred and I were a little apprehensive about that color choice, but I absolutely love it. It looks crisp and clean with the dark floors."

At the end of the hall is a spacious kitchen where Kristie cooks while the kids do homework and art projects at a honed granite counter snuggled between two columns. That counter opens to a dining area where the family and often the children's friends eat together nearly every night. "We have a great dining

a gift of hope

"I think as parents we want to make sure our children understand that we are a part of a bigger world, and we have to think of people less fortunate," says Kristie Edwards. "We are a religious family, and we believe this is how God intended it to be. We should help one another to the best of our abilities."

Kristie and Mike Edwards have donated countless hours to helping African-American and Hispanic boys and girls in Chicago's inner city. They began coaching Little League 15 years ago and were struck then with the need to do more for these youngsters. The Edwardses joined good friends Bob and Tina Muzikowski to found Chicago Hope Academy—a coed, nondenominational Christian high school on Chicago's near west side.

"We felt that these children were getting lost in the cracks after the three months in the summer we spent with them," Kristie says. "These weren't necessarily the A or F students, but the B and C students who needed structure and guidance."

In 2004, the Muzikowskis, the Edwardses, and other donors bought and renovated an old school building near downtown Chicago. The school opened in 2005 with about 72 students, and it now has about 115 boys and girls enrolled in grades 9 through 12.

Shortly after the school opened, Kristie and Mike opened their home to two students, who live with the family during the school week. "We have the space, so why not share?" Kristie asks.

For more information about Chicago Hope Academy, call 312/491-1600, or visit the school's Web site, chicagohopeacademy.com.



table, and we have people coming over all the time," says this ever-on-duty mother. "We always have room for more."

The kitchen, dining area, and sunroom on the back of the house give views and access to the backyard, where the children play basketball, volleyball, and nearly every other game imaginable. "We love to live outside, and one of our biggest goals with this house was to have a big beautiful backyard where we could play or hang out with the kids and the puppies," Kristie adds.

But even the Edwards family needs quiet time-outs occasionally, so Wilson created a music room and library above the garage. Clerestory windows accent a barrel-vaulted ceiling, which arcs to 17½ feet at its apex. The grand piano sits in a bay window on the front of the house. "The pointed bay out front is a great spot to look up and down the street," Wilson says. "It's sort of like the prow of a ship."

The house has an airy feeling throughout, thanks to high ceilings (10½ feet on the first level), large windows, and transoms that allow light to move from room to room. "Mike and I had the best team working on this house," notes Kristie. "We were really grateful for that. When we walked into the house, we immediately felt that we were home."

Judging from the daily activity at the Edwards house, others feel that way, too. That's a team spirit where everyone wins. ■

Architect: Fred Wilson, Morgante Wilson Interior designer: Nancy Bernstein

For more information, see sources on page 215.



The master bedroom is warm with grass cloth wall coverings and a cream-and-chocolate color scheme. Below: A freestanding soaking tub sits in the bath. Opposite: A glass tile rug is centered in front of one of two oak hip-and-tin vanities. Opposite bottom: Kristie (with Sophie, the Chassapoo), Jackson, Mike, and Kate hang out in the sunroom. We have a lot of dogs! Kristie jokes.

