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while, I was diagnosed with skin cancer and needed surgery. My mother did pass away; we buried her one day, and I had surgery the next. As October came, summer friends left one by one. We didn't find an appealing place to buy in the city. With things going badly, this was a challenging time in our journey. We felt marooned and exiled from our routines and patterns.

As the housing market cooled in late fall and fewer properties were for sale, there was one condo in the South End still available to consider. It was in a great building in a great location (SoWa) for walking, restaurants, and art. There was 24-hour concierge service, a roof deck with a great view of the city, and a courtyard garden. This 5th-floor loft had indoor parking for two cars, but what didn't appeal to us (or anyone else) was its dreariness. As the Realtor noted, "it doesn't show well."

The owner's furniture was shabby, and everything was a dingy beige — the floors, the walls, the cabinets. A total makeover was needed. We looked at it three times and then passed on it — we weren't looking for a "project." As the condo lingered

on the market, though, the price dropped. We reconsidered and decided to go for it. On December 2, 2011, we moved in.

I was worried about the unit's lack of character, but seeing the space empty was encouraging. As a blank canvas, I could see the possibilities for its transformation. It was time to get creative.

I spent months configuring the large open space with the help of a professional designer and an architect (Cheryl and Jeffrey Katz, respectively, of C&J Katz Studio). I called the process an innovation rather than a renovation, because we didn't take anything out — we brought stuff in. Our can-do contractor was Tom Connor, known as the "resident contractor" at our building because of all the work he's done there. His knowledge of the building was invaluable. Who else would know that you could vent the range hood outdoors via ducts in the floor and have matching drawer pulls in his private stash of spare parts?

Architectural details were employed to add intimacy to the space. To cozy up the 43-foot-long bedroom, we put up custom-made sliding doors, creating three rooms for their intended usage: bedroom,



## Where to find *cool stuff*

### LOCALLY

- **Garage Sale** on Waltham Street in the South End (*Paul McCobb Etagiere; coffee table*)
- **Lekker** on Washington Street in the South End (*dishes, gray throw blanket*)
- **Addo Novo** on Washington Street in the South End (*blue coat stand*)
- **Fast Frame** on East Berkeley Street in the South End (*reframe existing art*)
- **Wolfers Lighting** in Allston and Waltham
- **Shelf Genie** in Concord (*kitchen storage*)
- **Ideal Tile** on Needham Street in Newton (*kitchen glass tile*)
- **Prestige Glass** in Waltham (*glass kitchen counter*)
- **Yale Electric** (*all appliances*)
- **Consignworks** in Dudley (*long bookcase*)
- **Ikea** in Stoughton (*bookshelf*)
- **West Elm** and **Pottery Barn** (*mirrored night stands*)
- **Crate and Barrel** (*dining chairs, guest room mirrors*)

### ONLINE

1. **Wayfair.com:** Discounted home goods; excellent customer service
2. **Lumens.com:** Designer lighting
3. **LightingUniverse.com:** Great knockoffs of expensive designs
4. **Craigslist.org:** More efficient than yard sales
5. **Overstock.com:** Good for sheets, pillows, towels