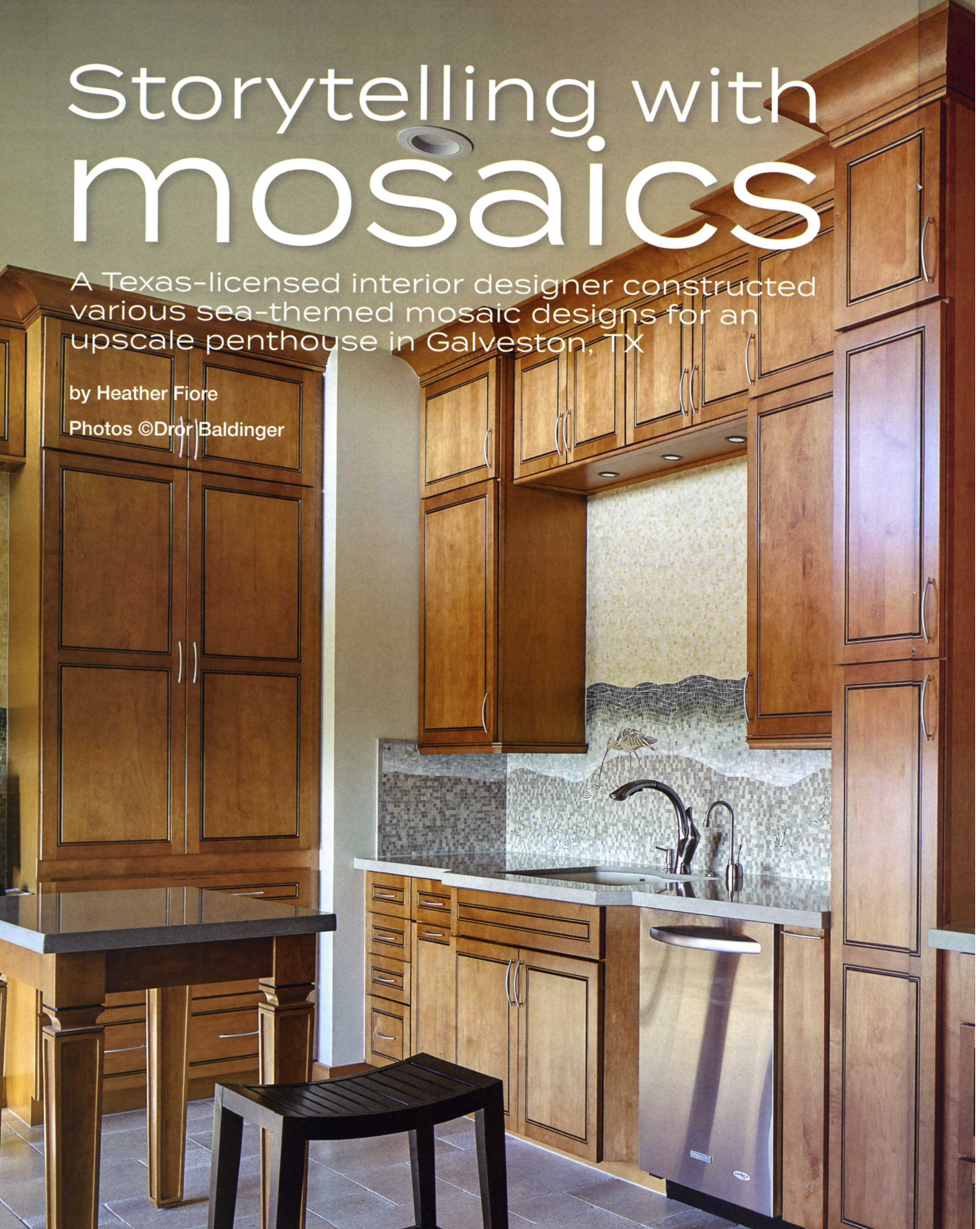


Storytelling with mosaics

A Texas-licensed interior designer constructed various sea-themed mosaic designs for an upscale penthouse in Galveston, TX

by Heather Fiore

Photos ©Dror Baldinger





The 5,900-square-foot penthouse features three sea-themed mosaic designs in the kitchen area.



Rahnee Gladwin is an interior designer, allied member of the American Institute of Architects and member of the Tile Heritage Foundation. Since 1997, she has also worked with stone, glass, metal and ceramics, specializing in custom mosaic design and assembly, through her company, R. Gladwin i Design Tile.

Recently, she was approached by a local architect, Betty Nichols, whose client was seeking a shore-themed mural for her penthouse in Galveston, TX. “She wanted to feature indigenous shore birds and incorporate local seashells that she collected of the Galveston, TX area beaches into a mosaic, bringing the outside into the penthouse suite on the 28th floor,” said Gladwin. “The murals tell the story of the beach life, reflecting it back to the 28th floor through the floor-to-ceiling windows, showing a panoramic view of the Gulf Coast.”

To help Gladwin bring the mural to life, the client provided various photos of shore birds that she liked, as well as photos of her seashell collection. “She wanted to keep to neutral colors for the birds,” said Gladwin, who worked closely with the clients throughout the duration of the project to ensure the desired designs were created. “All sketches, layout concepts and objects chosen for the murals were mine. I developed the concept based on the clients’ desires, from start to finish.”

Although Gladwin works with a lot of glass and ceramic tile in her designs, this particular concept called for a range of stone, including marble, limestone, travertine, dolomite and granite. “I used honed pieces to recede and for depth, and polished in pieces to add emphasis and sparkle to the water elements and well, as parts of the birds and seashells,” she said. “More than 45 different stones were used in the composition.”

Above the computer desk, 15 square feet of tile was used to create an ocean-inspired mural, with a seashell in the lower left of the design, inspired by the gold seashell art piece beside it on the bookshelf.

A main feature of the mural are herons, which are often seen perusing beaches.

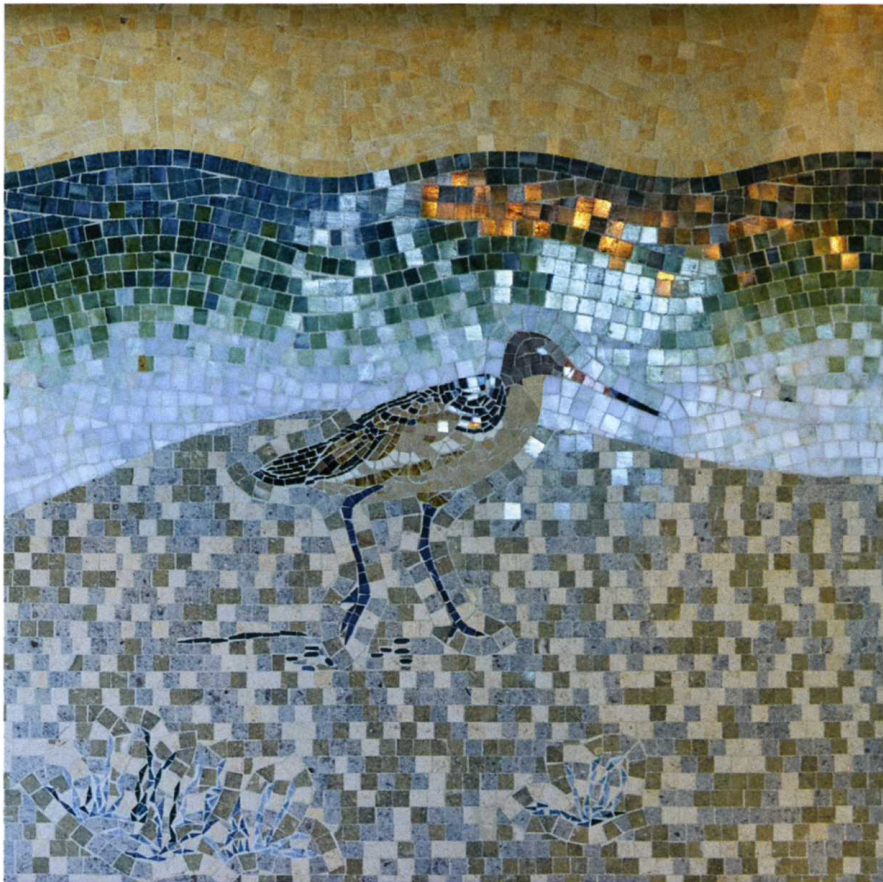
Gladwin uses various U.S. suppliers to gather her materials, which are then shipped to another mosaic studio she partners with for cutting and assembly. “I make sure that the quarry pulls on each stone are in the color range that I require for the piece,” she said. “I work with the cut and assembly staff overseeing the entire assembly process where each stone is hand-cut to fit and set, according to my finely detailed and scaled drawings.”

Once coloration is achieved, the stone tiles are cut down to mosaic pieces ranging from $\frac{9}{16} \times \frac{9}{16}$ to $\frac{3}{8} \times \frac{3}{8}$ inches, with some smaller pieces cut for finer details. These pieces are fine-tuned and crafted into decorative 12- x 12-inch panels, which are then cut to follow the requested design and tend to be irregular without straight edges. “Once each panel is fully assembled and recorded, the full panel is cut into pieces and mapped for installation on site,” said Gladwin. “Installation is overseen by me onsite, making sure all grout joints match and the grout selections are as approved.”

Three murals were created for the penthouse — one over the sink, one over the cooktop and one over the computer desk nearby. A total of 73 square feet of tile was used, with three panels created. Almost half of the material was utilized for the mural above the sink area, with the latter appropriated for the cooktop overhead and computer area. The entire mural flows seamlessly from space to space and features Hudsonian godwits, blue crabs and seashells.

“It was a little challenging creating a mural story from the pieces and parts provided by the clients into a unified

Different types of seashells from the owner’s personal collection were also incorporated into the design, along with seaweed and other seaside accents.





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and meaningful artwork," said Gladwin. "However, site management was made easy by the client, as they provided their private jet for meetings onsite. Decisions were able to be made in a timely fashion and fun was had by all."

It took just under nine months to complete the murals, which the clients are ecstatic about. "They wanted to bring

the outdoors in, or the beach to the 28th floor with their favorite birds and shells," said Gladwin. "They are surrounded by the blue waters of the Gulf outside and inside. Even on an overcast day, the inside beach is open and the sun is shining on the waves. The murals can be viewed from the living and dining areas, as well as the wraparound balcony." **TILE**

*Private residence
Galveston, TX*

TILE MANUFACTURER: R. Gladwin i
Design Tile, Fredericksburg, TX
TILE INSTALLER: Total Floors,
Webster, TX