

# New England HOME

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Celebrating Fine Design, Architecture, and Building

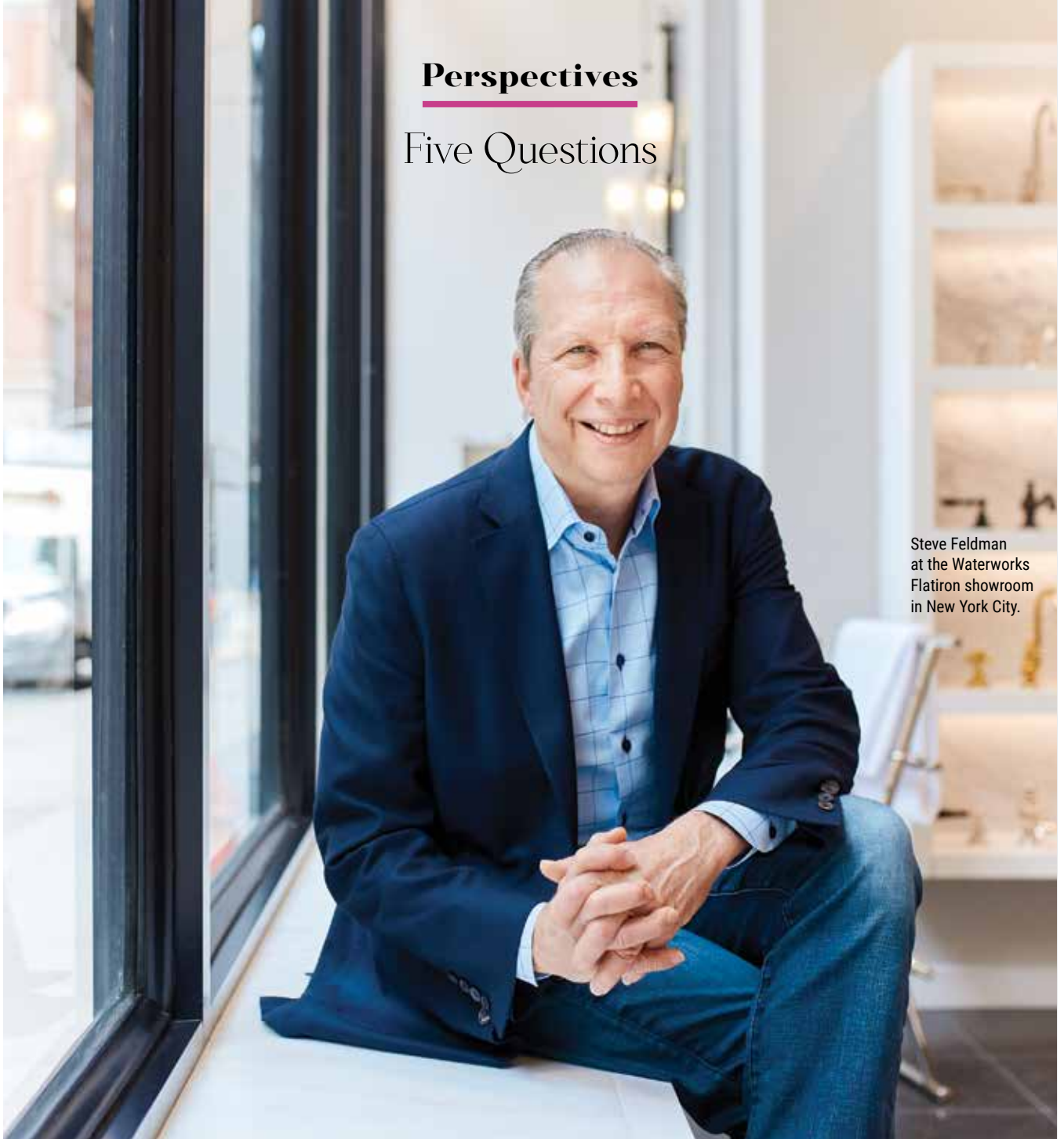
## Rooms With Zest

Carefree living doesn't  
mean scrimping on style



## Perspectives

### Five Questions



Steve Feldman  
at the Waterworks  
Flatiron showroom  
in New York City.

Luxury kitchens get a second life thanks to Steve Feldman, founder of the nonprofit Renovation Angel.

#### **1 How did you come up with the idea of recycling luxury kitchens for charity?**

After a twenty-year career in radio, mostly in Providence, I wanted to give something back. In 1998, I left my job and began fundraising for an addiction recovery outreach program; I'm a recovered addict of thirty-one years. One day I spotted a mansion that was being demolished in Greenwich, and I had a revelation: instead of sending the remains to a dump, couldn't parts of it, such as the

kitchen, be removed and sold to help others? My idea was that everyone could win: the homeowner could get a tax deduction, buyers would get a bargain, fewer materials would go to the dump, and charities would benefit from the revenues we earned.

#### **2 What happened next?**

The idea really took off. Initially, we got offers to donate kitchens from architects, builders, real estate

| INTERVIEW BY ROBERT KIENER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT FURMAN |

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agents, and homeowners in Greenwich. In 2005, I set up the 501(c)(3) charity Green Demolitions, and that has evolved into today's Renovation Angel. We have expanded throughout the region and to date have recycled more than 6,500 kitchens—saving 38 million pounds of material from landfills—and created over \$22 million dollars' worth of recycling jobs. We employ thirty-eight people, including designers, salespeople, removal crews, and drivers. And we've earned \$2.3 million for charities that help at-risk youth, the homeless, and addiction recovery.

**3 How does the process work?** We get referrals from homeowners, designers, agents, architects, and other professionals in the design/build industries. We probably decline more than half of the kitchen projects that come our way. These may be too old, too small, too outdated, or in bad condition. For example, there are some styles that

are a no-no for us, such as the arched oak door look, washed oak that is dated. Certain styles of cabinetry—the classic inset doors, the classic Shakers—retain their value. The people who have traditional kitchens in good condition to donate do well with us. We recently removed a twelve-year-old custom-built \$250,000 kitchen from a home in Greenwich. It included beautiful handcrafted cabinets and Sub-Zero and Wolf appliances. The couple who donated this kitchen were able to save about \$30,000 between removal costs and their tax deduction. It was a total win-win situation.

#### **4 How do I know a pre-owned kitchen will fit into my space?**

Kitchens are generally modular and easy to retrofit. For example, it's easy to convert an L-shaped kitchen into a galley design. If you have a smaller space, you can use fewer cabinets. There are a few basic guidelines, however. For example, the ceiling heights have to be comparable. If you have twelve-foot ceilings, you can put almost any kitchen in the world in there. But if you have an eight-foot kitchen

ceiling, you can't buy a nine-foot-high kitchen. Also, say you need eighteen cabinets in your kitchen; you buy one from us that has twenty or twenty-five cabinets and you can mix and match what you need in the kitchen and use the extra cabinets for your pantry, garage, or somewhere else.

#### **5 Who are your buyers?**

We call them "luxury bargain hunters." They are doctors, lawyers, business people, entrepreneurs, house flippers, and the HGTV dreamers. They don't have—or don't want to spend—\$100,000 for a kitchen, but they can get one from us for \$10,000 and a little fixing up. We have sold plenty of \$125,000 kitchens for \$15,000 to \$20,000. People who buy (and those who donate) are motivated in three ways. Some are really green and very into sustainability. Other people are about the money and want to save on a project. And there are people whose main motivation is they want to do something charitable. Buyers can come to our website or to our 43,000-square-foot retail showroom in Fairfield, New Jersey. | *Renovation Angel, renovationangel.com* ■■■