

THE MAGAZINE OF SPLENDID HOMES AND GARDENS • MAY/JUNE 2008

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PETER VANDENWARKER

MAY/JUNE 2008

Outside Influence • New England homes are embracing the great outdoors. Where once the architect's task was to provide shelter from the elements, today the assignment is to open houses to their surroundings. Whether a clever renovation of a modernist house (where walls of glass bring the garden into the living room) or a Maine getaway that offers breathtaking views (from a porch complete with a fireplace to take the chill off Down East evenings), this issue of *Design New England* will inspire you to get back to nature.

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THE LANDSCAPE, ARTFULLY designed with the help of Zen Associates of Woburn, Massachusetts, combines mature trees, rhododendrons, and a multitiered Japanese garden. The deck and grounds are at the same level as the floor of the house allowing the interior and exterior spaces to work as a continuum.



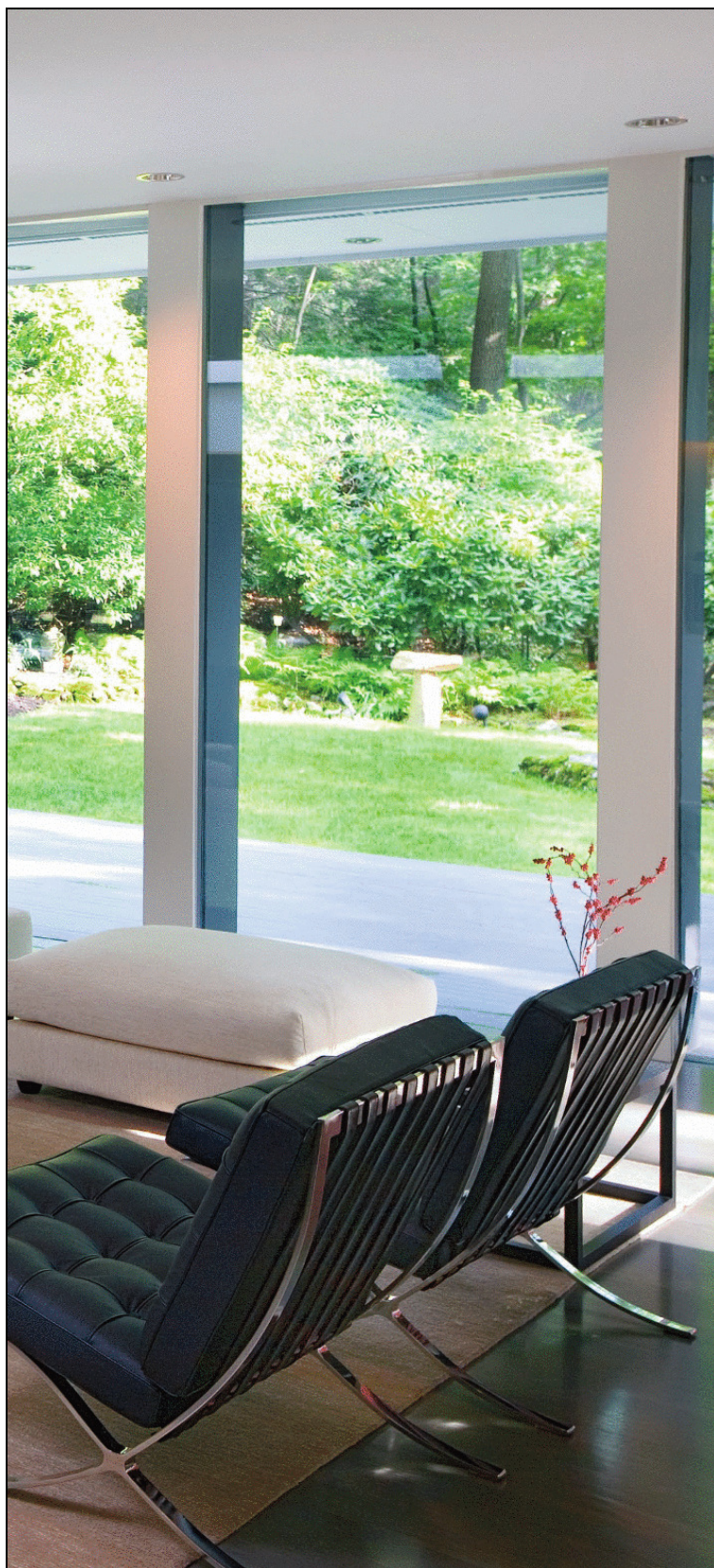
Back to the Future

With an architecturally sensitive renovation, a modernist house finds a new groove

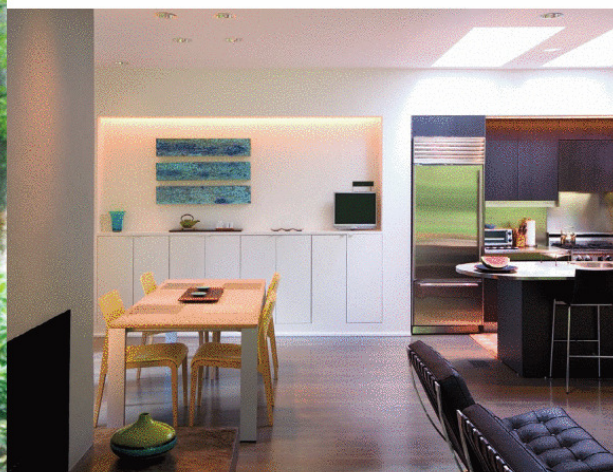
Written by JANICE BYRD
Photography by PETER VANDERWARKER
Architecture by DGG ARCHITECT







CLASSIC 20TH-CENTURY FURNITURE (LEFT) such as the Mies van der Rohe coffee table and side chairs is augmented by a sofa from Roche Bobois. Daniel Wood, a designer with M2L Collection in Boston, helped the owners arrange the room to best complement the updated house. The 1980's Boffi kitchen (BELOW) was freshened up with new cabinet doors.



IN 1952, HENRY KRUGER, AN INDUSTRIAL DESIGNER BY vocation and an architect by avocation, designed and built a simple box-within-a-box house for his family in a Boston suburb. Since then, this sleek, modernist house has captured the hearts of its three successive owners, all of whom felt fortunate to live in it.

The second owners, Tom and Regina Pyle, lived there for 20 years before selling the house to the third and current owners seven years ago. Fans of modern architecture, these new owners instantly sensed Henry Kruger's vision. They became friends with his widow, Mildred, and his daughter, Brook Lipsitt, as well as with the Pyles. All remain passionately attached to the house.

Lipsitt was a young girl when her father designed the house and she recalls that he couldn't find a contractor willing to build it. "They all said that it was impossible because the house doesn't have interior walls," she says. "My father acted as his own contractor, and he hired off-duty firemen to work with him."

When her family moved in, the house was far from finished, it still had plywood floors and kinks in the heating system were being worked out. The first time they turned on the heat, Lipsitt recalls, the entire wall of glass in the living room shattered. Despite such setbacks, she says, the house "was quite wonderful, very indoor/outdoor." It was also a great source of amazement for the neighbors. "No one had ever seen a house like it, and people would come by and ask if they could look inside. My father was happy to show it off — it was

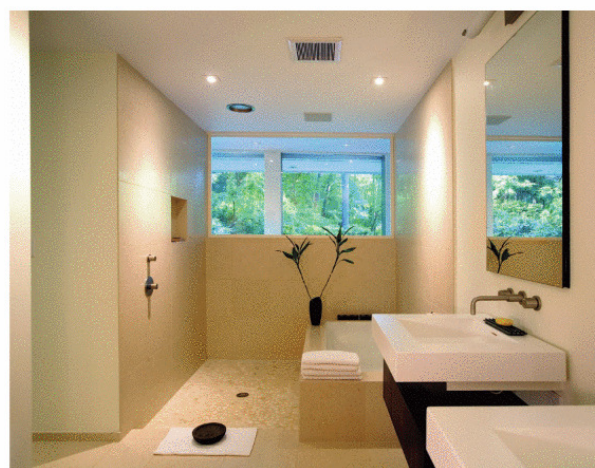


his baby. He would say, 'Either you are going to be passionate about it, or you are not going to care for it.' "

The current owners are in the first category. "As soon as I entered the front door, I knew that I wanted to live here. I've never had that feeling about a house before," says one of the owners. "With its flat facade, the house does not look like much from the outside. As soon as you step inside, the perspective changes. The front, formal side of the house has the least amount of windows, while the entire back south side is floor-to-ceiling windows."

His partner adds: "Kruger designed the house so that the plane of the floor is level with the deck and the lawn. You are intrinsically aware of everything going on outside." Says the other owner: "Even animals are confused with the blending of inside and out. Squirrels and chipmunks approach the window and look surprised to see us there."

The couple lived in the house for a year in order to gain perspective about what to do to bring it up to date and make it their own. They called in Daniel Gallagher, the principal of DGG Architect in New York City. He remembers the day he first saw the place. "I made my way through a neighborhood of typical suburban houses till I came to the address," he says. "I thought this couldn't be real. I loved it from the moment I saw it."



THE MASTER BEDROOM (TOP) is serene and spare. Furnishings such as a platform bed and George Nelson bench appear to be floating. A pair of etchings by the Japanese artist Taka Maruno contribute to the calm atmosphere. In the adjacent master bath (**BOTTOM**), wall-mounted square resin sinks also float above the floor. To connect the lower level to the rest of the house, the owners added tempered glass panels (**FACING PAGE**) to the bedroom floor.





The owners were fully involved in both the design process and the nitty-gritty of the renovation. They personally bought the lighting, flooring, appliances, and cans of paint. "We had a great architect as well as outstanding people such as John Natale [the general contractor from Natale Co. & Safety Care in Woburn, Massachusetts], who rebuilt the whole plumbing and heating systems," says one of the owners. "The entire project was a fun labor of love."

"Designing or planning so that everything is open to the back is the key to everything we did in the house," says Gallagher. "You can see clearly from the south side of the house to the north side. We have a complete sense of living in every part of the house."

THE LAWN, DECK, AND LIVING ROOM FLOOR (ABOVE) are on the same plane, creating a sense that the interior and exterior spaces are extensions of each other. Looking across the staircase to the master suite (FACING PAGE), the angle of glass panels plays out in a geometric pattern.

The kitchen is testimony that good design is timeless. The previous owners had renovated the space in the 1980s. "The design was so good," says one of the owners, "that all we had to do was replace the facades of the cabinets. Boffi [the Italian manufacturer of kitchen and bathroom fixtures] still makes the very same cabinets."

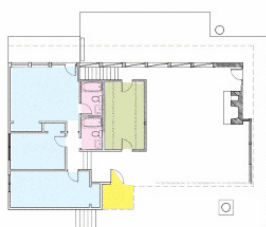
The owners furnished the house with a few key pieces of modern furniture, such as a classic coffee table by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, a sofa from Roche Bobois, and a sleek shelf from Montage, a Boston retailer.

Mildred and Henry Kruger were passionate gardeners, and the grounds have mature trees and shrubs so artfully planted that the $\frac{1}{3}$ -acre lot looks like a grand estate. However, the landscape did need some intervention, including cutting back overgrowth and taking out a dog run and chain-link fence set in concrete, which the new owners removed with a rented jackhammer and days of backbreaking labor. They added a four-tier Japanese ornamental garden, complete

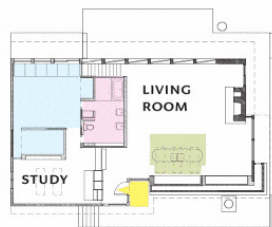
Builder
Natale Company
+ Safety Care,
Woburn, Massachusetts

Landscape Design
Zen Associates,
Woburn, Massachusetts

Interiors
Daniel Wood,
M2L Collection, Boston



Original 1952 plan



Updated 2008 plan

BEDROOM BATH KITCHEN ENTRY

HENRY KRUGER DESIGNED a three-bedroom, two-bath house with a galley kitchen. In the 1980s, Tom and Regina Pyle, the home's second owners, moved the kitchen to create an open floor plan. The two bathrooms were combined and expanded to create a master bath. The two smaller bedrooms were replaced by a walk-in closet in the master suite and a study. The current owners renovated the bathroom and further modified the entry hall, study, and closet.

with cascading water. Each level is a garden room: One has a bench perfect for contemplation or viewing the expanse of the property, another is an ideal spot for extending the outdoor entertaining space.

"The house seems to elicit strong emotions from everyone who visits," says one of the owners. "People who at first seem uncomfortable in its open and minimal design seem driven to return and study it."

As a case in point, the couple recall that one friend on her first visit sat on the sofa looking uncomfortable and uptight, her hands planted to the side. "She looked around as if trying to understand how anyone could live in such a streamlined space, with its near full walls of glass bringing the outdoors right up to your living room," one of the owners says.

On her next visit, however, she lay back on the couch, laughed, and marveled, "You know, I could live like this." ■

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