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# opposite attractions

A spectacular landscape sets the scene for house as minimalist backdrop



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**R**OBERT AND SHELLY FOLZ DON'T HAVE ANY ART ON THE WALLS OF THEIR NEWLY RENOVATED HOUSE in Hollis, New Hampshire. What they do have are spectacular living landscapes framed in expansive unadorned windows. Art would be a distraction.

The site, at the end of a meandering driveway off a winding country road, is a private and secluded paradise. A total of 5 acres, the property sits at the edge of a reservoir that the Folzes can see through their new kitchen windows. On the other side of the house is another striking water feature: two man-made ponds, totaling almost 12,000 square feet, complete with an



**CUSTOM CABINETRY** in the kitchen (ABOVE) is by Moda Cucina of Boston. Standing at the corrugated aluminum island (BOTTOM RIGHT) are Robert Folz, left, and Milton Manousaridis. In the living room (TOP RIGHT), the gas fireplace is faced with 12-inch-by-24-inch wood-textured porcelain tile.



island and two waterfalls, that nestle in the softly rolling hill just beyond their front door.

The landscape was originally designed in 1985 by a previous owner, who may have had a horticulturist's eye for manipulating nature but lacked an architectural vision for the house the Folzes and their daughters, Sydney, 9, and Katie, 2, now call home. The building was a nondescript 1980s contemporary with an inefficient floor plan and small, ill-placed windows that offered little in the way of views.

"We knew we wanted a modern design with steel, concrete, and aluminum throughout,"





says Robert Folz. And with such lush surroundings, “we wanted big windows, so the focus would be on the property outside.”

The Folzes hired Milton and Amalia Manousaridis, a husband-and-wife team whose residential design firm, Archspaces LLC, is based in Wellesley, Massachusetts. “The general concept for the house was pure, extreme minimalism,” says Milton Manousaridis. “We wanted a museum quality.”

That such like-minded clients and designers chanced upon each other was a stroke of good fortune. The Folzes had discussed their plans with area architects, but all had too much of a traditional bent for them. So the couple forged ahead on their own with the help of builder Philip North of Northern Improvements in Amherst, New Hampshire. “We were a bit into things before we hooked up with Milton and Amalia,” says Robert Folz, who was referred to the designers by Paul Hatziliades, owner of Moda Cucina, the Boston company that provided the custom kitchen cabinets. “As soon as we found them and started talking, we knew we had the right people,” says Folz. “This design came from the heart,” adds Amalia Manousaridis. “It’s what comes naturally for us. We would design our own home this way.”

A similarly simpatico relationship was established with Zen Associates Inc., the Woburn, Massachusetts, landscape company the Folzes hired to draw up a master plan for the property, which had been neglected over several years. The goal, says Shinichiro Abe, a principal at Zen, was to preserve the hardscape and reduce the scale. “The backbone of the garden was a strong design scheme,” says Abe of the Japanese-influenced program. “When things are overgrown, it can destroy the balance.”

“We did a lot of addition by subtraction,” says Jon Russo, who is Zen’s project manager for the Folz property. “We replaced some plantings — the Sargent hemlocks, for example. But we removed more than we planted.” That opened up views, exposed the island and stepping-stones in the larger pond, and created more suitable proportions.

**THE POLISHED CONCRETE FLOOR in the entry hall (FACING PAGE) is dappled with sunlight from the tall windows behind the staircase, which is fabricated with I-beams. The Longhi Italia door to the right leads to the home office. Robert and Sydney Folz play pool in the first-floor game room (RIGHT), which is in sync with the home’s minimalist aesthetic. The game room bath (TOP RIGHT) is finished with 24-inch-square Corten Metallica porcelain tiles. Sliders inside the shower stall open to a secret garden, where an outdoor shower is planned. The Vero wall-mounted toilet is by Duravit.**







Scale and balance are also at the core of the restful harmony inside the house, where the white, black, and gray palette yields the quiet tone Milton Manousaridis was looking for. “Shelly and Robert are both very visual people,” he says of his clients, who own Visuals Unlimited, a stock photography company that specializes in scientific, medical, and natural-history images, which operates from an office suite on the first floor. “They had the basic concept and then wanted to be fed from that.”

One of the last elements to be designed and built was the staircase. “We beat the heck out of how and why the stairs would be,” says Robert Folz. While the new stairway ended up where the

**A COBBLESTONE PATH, which dips beneath a stone bridge (TOP LEFT), leads to the reservoir. Shelly and Katie Folz, 2, with cousin Mackenzie Cross-Swartzell, 5, by the man-made pond (BOTTOM LEFT).**





**A GENTLY CURVING WALK leads from the front door (obscured from view by a weeping white pine) to the edge of the pond. Behind the large sitting stone encircled by cattails is a Japanese-style footbridge.**

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original had been, it is very much part of the new collaborative design. Builder North gets the credit for the custom fabrication that called for mounting the 4-inch-thick wooden treads onto metal plates and then attaching them to an I-beam that is the single center stringer. Finished with custom-made brushed-steel railings and wire cables, the stairway is at once industrial and sculptural, and, like everything in this project, its success derives from balance and transparency. “It is like art,” Milton Manousaridis says of the architectural design process, “putting things where they are intended.” ■