

GLASS HOUSE

A bold transformation on Gibson Island respects the home's Mid-Century Modern past

Text by Sharon Jaffe Dan | Photography by Allen Russ





While studying architecture at Yale during the 1950s, a young Washingtonian named Avery Faulkner accepted a challenge from his father: to design a summer home on a wooded lot the senior Faulkner had purchased on Gibson Island, a private Chesapeake Bay enclave near Annapolis. Avery conceived a spare, Modernist retreat that paid homage to The Glass House—the iconic Connecticut masterpiece by Phillip Johnson, who was then one of Faulkner’s architecture professors. Local lore contends that Johnson even visited the site to survey the single-story, glass-enclosed creation, sited to enjoy views of the island’s Otter Pond.

The abode remained in the Faulkner family until the early 1990s. Subsequent owners remodeled the dwelling, adding on a second-floor primary suite 20 years before they put it on the market in 2018.

As fate would have it, the next buyer knew Gibson Island well. In the late 1990s, she and her husband had moved into a large residence next door to the Faulkner house, where they lived year-round until he passed away in 2017. Intending to downsize but remain on the island, the wife sold their home and acquired her neighbor’s smaller one.

A renovation was in the cards, given the dwelling’s outmoded infrastructure and dated improvements. The owner tasked Bethesda architect Jim Rill with revamping the property while respecting its mid-century lineage. “The home sat like a pretty little jewel that had been worked over,” Rill recalls. “It was like finding an old piece of art and when you chip off some paint, there’s a Rembrandt behind it. The original house was so pure and architectural, we wanted to strip it back to its bones and build on that.”

Lowered ceilings and obtrusive ductwork—introduced when air-conditioning was first installed—had to go. So did the terra-cotta tile floors, dated kitchen cabinetry and walls blocking sight lines to the pond. “The lowered ceilings encroached on the glass,” observes the architect. “Rooms were more closed-off and there wasn’t good flow.”

Renovation Architecture: James Rill, AIA, Rill Architects, Bethesda, Maryland. Landscape Design: Gibson Island Corporation, Gibson Island, Maryland. Renovation Contractor: Darren Kornas, ThinkMakeBuild, Annapolis, Maryland.



Previous spread: A new screened porch and pool up the outdoor-living ante on the revamped property; prior owners completed the second-story addition, with its curved roofline. A glass-enclosed entry (opposite) seamlessly added onto the structure creates a warmer welcome. A Kelly Wearstler chandelier, Caracole buffet and Four Hands table grace the dining room (this page). Western Windows through The Sanders Company offer floor-to-ceiling views.



Seated on the living room's Bernhardt sectional and a blue RH swivel chair, guests can enjoy views of Otter Pond. The chandelier is from Allen Knight.



Removing these vestiges of former redos created an open, airy slate for dramatic, 21st-century updates. Though she sought a clean-lined, contemporary look in contrast to her previous traditional home, the owner resisted a full-on mid-century revival. “I wanted to stay true to what the house was, but make it livable for me,” she explains. “With good architecture, you can mix styles and it doesn’t have to be all one way.”

The original structure was shaped like an off-center plus sign. The volume parallel to the pond housed living and dining areas, a kitchen and a garage. Both legs of the perpendicular wing contained two small bedrooms with shared baths.

While the new floor plan didn’t stray much, Rill made some strategic additions. A new, glassed-in foyer extends the original front entry into the landscape, creating a warmer welcome. And in back, a spacious screened porch was built atop part of an existing terrace, where a new pool also awaits. Bedrooms on the water side were repurposed as a dining room and an office for the owner, an attorney; the front bedrooms are reserved for guests.

Clever improvements elevate day-to-day living in what is now the 3,150-square-foot residence. New Marvin windows maximize views and energy efficiency. A tidy mudroom off the garage delivers style and utility. And near the kitchen, a laundry room and a pantry housing an extra fridge are neatly tucked away.

A new floating stair leads to the primary suite. Rill reworked the oversized bedroom, carving out an expansive closet and luxurious bath featuring a new double vanity; a walk-in shower replaced its “space-age” predecessor.

Throughout the home, an organic material palette—from wood paneling to stone-like Porcelanosa flooring—allows prevailing views of the landscape to steal the show. With interior design help from New York-based Patricia Bonis and Chevy Chase, Maryland, designer Basha White, the owner selected bold light fixtures and modern furniture with feminine lines to create a relaxed but sophisticated tone.

In the open plan, the foyer leads directly to a casual seating area anchored by a floating fireplace wall that was original to the home; the living room lies on the opposite side. The open kitchen, with its sleek custom cabinetry and quartz countertops, fosters entertaining with easy access to the adjacent dining room and screened porch.

“The home acts as a gateway to the pond and nature,” affirms Rill, “so you’re always experiencing the outdoors.”

Whether she’s working in the office or relaxing on the porch, the owner revels in her estuary habitat. “The house has really nice indoor-outdoor flow,” she says. “I see foxes and deer every day. And around dusk, the osprey go fishing. It’s great to sit outside with a cocktail or cold drink and watch them dive-bombing.”



Millwork in the new glass entry (above) incorporates storage and a coat closet; two guest rooms are visible along the front façade. The foyer leads to a casual seating area near the original fireplace wall (left), its former white brick now clad in wood-look tile. Danish Builders fabricated the walnut and white-lacquered cabinetry in the adjacent kitchen. Low-maintenance quartz lines the island and backsplash; Circa Lighting pendants and brass hardware add a touch of glam.



“The home acts as a gateway to the pond and nature, so you’re always experiencing the outdoors.” —JIM RILL



The architect reconfigured the second-level primary suite, bringing the oversized bedroom (left) down to scale to make way for a spa-like bath (above). Mirrors frame reflected views of the scenery. The tile and marble-like wall surface are from Porcelanosa.

While a short walk takes her to the Chesapeake Bay, this Gibson Island resident prefers life on Otter Pond, where she can go kayaking, paddle boarding or swimming right from her dock. “My husband used to say, ‘The bay is drama, but the pond is poetry,’” she recalls.

Neighbors who’ve watched what’s known as the “see-through house” evolve over the years have told the owner that her home looks great—but they can’t pinpoint exactly what has changed. “That’s the highest compliment,” she reflects. “Jim made it shine like it was supposed to.” ↴