

# URBAN OASIS

A new, glass-lined Bethesda abode embraces its scenic site while channeling a spirit of escape

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Previous spread: The L-shaped residence forms a courtyard where Peegee hydrangeas border a lagoon-like pool featuring a teal-toned finish. The double-height family room (opposite) enjoys leafy backyard views. In the front (above), sepele and deep-blue-painted stucco clad the home's two volumes, which are connected by a glass hyphen.

**L**ooking for a place to unwind, a pair of DC-area professionals considered buying a weekend retreat near the shore—but then changed tack. Their new approach: to build a sanctuary in Bethesda they could enjoy full-time. As the husband, a corporate communications executive, recalls, “We thought, ‘Let’s rent a house when we go to the beach and make our primary home a vacation home.’”

A vacation-house-in-the-city mindset informed decisions along the way, starting with the lot selection. When a one-acre, woodland parcel belying its close-in location became available in 2018, the couple grabbed it. “The integration between indoors and outdoors was key” to their vision for a permanent haven, says the wife, a political consultant. “This was pre-covid, so the idea was to be able to relax in a Zen-like space when we came home from work and to have guests feel calm, comfortable and relaxed too.”

With demolition slated for an existing 1950s house, they tapped architect Mark Kaufman to design airy new digs that would showcase the property’s natural splendor. “They wanted a contemporary home with a lot of glass on the back side and some sense of privacy

in front,” recounts Kaufman, a principal at GTM Architects. “They also wanted to be able to walk in the front door and see through to the beautiful backyard.”

Kaufman forged an L-shaped plan that fit the bill. “We started taking in all these parts and pieces—what’s the best view on the lot, where are we getting the best daylighting, how do we want to organize the more public and private spaces—and the L shape started to make a lot of sense,” he explains. “We created two wings that are connected by a glass hyphen.”

Soaring windows and sliding doors, all framed in black, dominate the back without overexposing the occupants. “Because of the home’s shape, you feel protected,” observes Kaufman. “You don’t feel like you’re on display here, even though you’re surrounded by glass.” On the exterior, those gleaming expanses are interspersed with sapele siding and deep-blue-painted stucco.

Architecture: **Mark Kaufman**, AIA, LEED AP, GTM Architects, Bethesda, Maryland. Interior Design: **Annette Hannon**, Annette Hannon Interior Design, Burke, Virginia. Builder: Thorsen Construction, Alexandria, Virginia. Landscape Design: **Leslie Gignoux** and **Scott Fritz**, Fritz & Gignoux Landscape Architects, Washington, DC. Landscape Contractor: Joel Hafner, Fine Earth Landscape, Poolesville, Maryland.



In the breakfast area, a Saarinen table and Cherner side chairs from Design Within Reach round out a bespoke banquette designed by Mark Kaufman and fabricated by Maryland Custom Cabinets.



Clockwise from above: White oak floors flow through the open-plan kitchen/breakfast area/family room and much of the home. From the front entry/glass hyphen, guests enjoy a carefully considered backyard view of a sculptural Japanese maple. The wide, oak-lined opening from the foyer to the living room surreptitiously houses coat closets on both sides; the living room's dark-painted shiplap and shelving were milled from Douglas fir beams salvaged from the site's original home. Pendants by Umage hover over the 10-foot kitchen island.

Skillfully sited, the 7,800-square-foot dwelling takes full advantage of the sun. The L opens up to southern exposure, ushering in natural light. Additionally, 80 solar panels on the flat roof help the homeowners approach their goal of net-zero energy consumption. According to the husband, "For months in the spring and fall, the meter is running backwards."

Visitors step first into the glass link, where floor-to-ceiling windows reveal the backyard vista. To the left, the dining room sits up front, saving the stellar views for the glass-lined kitchen/breakfast area/family room, which crescendos to a 20-plus-foot ceiling. A screened porch housing a double-grill outdoor kitchen extends off that space. The opposite wing holds the living room, floating stairs and library. On the second floor, a gathering spot situated in the hyphen separates the primary suite from three other bedrooms (the couple's adult son and daughter each claim one). The walk-out basement comprises recreational areas, a gym and guest quarters.





The screened porch (above) boasts two retractable walls that provide seamless flow; travertine stepping stones connect to the changing room and shower. By trimming the porch ceiling and family-room fireplace wall in sapele (right), Kaufman visually connected interior and exterior spaces. The outdoor shower (below), also clad in sapele, projects a resort-like vibe.



“The driving force was marrying the interior with the exterior.”

—ANNETTE HANNON



After the husband provided the number of linear feet required to house their extensive book collection, Mark Kaufman exceeded his expectations with custom library shelves and a movable ladder to access hard-to-reach volumes. Annette Hannon designed the clean-lined, walnut-and-bronze desk.

Before ground broke, designer Annette Hannon joined the team, specifying everything from finishes to furnishings. She and Kaufman collaborated on the kitchen design, which was predicated on entertaining. A lengthy, marble-topped island with a waterfall edge offers plenty of prep and serving space; it's also where the wife prefers to work from home.

Wood accents warm up the sparkling interiors. Sapele pocket doors on the family room's fireplace/television wall conceal a bar and storage space; the same wood reappears on the breakfast-area banquette. Walnut built-ins wrap around the library, which doubles as the husband's office.

Nature dictated the décor. "The driving force for the whole project was marrying the interior with the exterior," asserts Hannon. Benjamin Moore's Pale Oak, Hannon's pick for most public-area walls, creates a neutral canvas for the "living artwork" outside. Comfortable seating selections sport durable fabrics in tranquil shades of blue and gray that complement the view.

The lighting choices, she adds, "respect the interior architecture's contemporary aesthetic." Case in point: a sleek, 19-light pendant from Konzept Lighting that drops from the family room ceiling.

That social space spills out to a tumbled-travertine terrace, complete with swimming pool and hot tub. A bocce ball court lies along the side yard, opposite a changing room and outdoor shower. Fritz & Gignoux, who masterminded the landscape plan, added a modern garden that further ties the built environment to its surroundings. "We made it so that the house feels merged with the natural landscape," observes Leslie Gignoux, who founded the firm with husband Scott Fritz. "There's a very thoughtful and peaceful presence to the place that is intentional."

Hannon established zones for outdoor dining, relaxing and lounging with Brown Jordan furniture. The porch table can extend to accommodate a crowd. Two sofas join a streamlined Paloform fire pit on the terrace, creating a spot, she says, "to hang out and have cocktails."

The completed property offers a halcyon respite for owners and friends alike. "When the weather is warm, we have people over almost every weekend," reveals the wife. "There's lots of eating, lots of getting wet in the pool, hot tub and outdoor shower. It's just like a vacation home." ■

#### SOURCES OF NOTE

Countertop, Backsplash & Fireplace Fabrication: [usamarbleandgranite.com](http://usamarbleandgranite.com). Hall Bench & Family Room Pillow Fabric: [hollyhunt.com](http://hollyhunt.com). Paint: [benjaminmoore.com](http://benjaminmoore.com). Windows: [marvin.com](http://marvin.com) and [westernwindows.com](http://westernwindows.com) through [thesanderscompany.com](http://thesanderscompany.com). Kitchen Appliances & Plumbing and Outdoor Grill & Shower: [fergusonshowrooms.com](http://fergusonshowrooms.com). For a complete list of resources, see [homeanddesign.com](http://homeanddesign.com).