

THE MAGAZINE of *SPLENDID HOMES and GARDENS* • MARCH/APRIL 2013

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A NEW HOUSE IN AN ESTABLISHED NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS, NEIGHBORHOOD IS DESIGNED TO GIVE AN ACTIVE FAMILY ROOM TO GROW, PLAY, AND GATHER — INDOORS AND OUT

WRITTEN BY JILL CONNORS • PHOTOGRAPHED BY MICHAEL J. LEE



THE SOUTH-FACING rear facade is designed to maximize access to and enjoyment of the yard. A distinctive onion-dome copper roof tops the screened three-season room that connects to the breakfast room and kitchen. Alfresco dining happens at the table on the patio just off the family room. The pool is just behind the raised planting beds and fence to the far right.



The family, a professional couple with three children under age 10, wanted what would feel like a vacation house and live like a forever house. "We'd been looking around casually for something we could build from scratch, so we could design a house close to what would be the perfect setup for our family, especially as they grow," says the homeowner.

They were living in a Victorian house they had finished renovating in 2008 in one of the most desirable neighborhoods in Newton, Massachusetts, when a nearby 1.5-acre corner lot with more than the average amount of backyard came on the market. Seeing the opportunity to create the house of their dreams, they bought the property in 2009 and began a two-year planning and design process with their design team: architect

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LDA
ARCHITECTURE
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INTERIOR DESIGN
JILL LITNER
KAPLAN
INTERIORS

LANDSCAPE DESIGN
MATTHEW
CUNNINGHAM
LANDSCAPE
DESIGN

Treff LaFleche of LDA Architecture & Interiors in Cambridge, Massachusetts, interior designer Jill Litner Kaplan of Jill Litner Kaplan Interiors in Newton, and landscape architect Matthew Cunningham of Matthew Cunningham Landscape Design in Melrose, Massachusetts. "Everything we thought about for this house," says the owner, "was through the family use of the space."

"This was an opportunity for not only a bigger house but also a bigger property," says LaFleche. "The property itself drove a lot of the design." He optimized the corner location with a triangular footprint



NATURAL LIGHT ABOUND in the kitchen and adjoining breakfast area (TOP), where exterior and interior windows create a bright space enhanced by the polished-granite on the 11-foot island, see-through bar stools, and mirrored top panels in the cabinet doors. Traditional forms such as gambrel gables and a mix of cedar shingles, stone, and standing seam copper on the street facade (ABOVE) create visual interest and downplay the house's volume.



THE CEDAR-LINED octagonal-shaped screened porch is an in-home vacation retreat that includes seating beneath the cathedral dome and a dining area near the stone fireplace. A fieldstone patio (FACING PAGE, BOTTOM) is easily accessed from the three-season room, kitchen, and family room. The pool (FACING PAGE, TOP) is surrounded by low-key fencing and low-maintenance native plantings.



DESIGN DECISION *Go Native*

Landscape designer Matthew Cunningham's environmentally sound approach to this property is also low-maintenance. Working with landscape contractor Phil Mastroianni of Waltham, Massachusetts, he incorporated 95 percent native plant materials, a 3,400-gallon rainwater-capture system that irrigates the property, and areas of pea stone that allow surface water to percolate into the watershed. Food sources for wildlife include low- and high-bush blueberry, viburnum, and holly. The work will continue now that the owners have purchased an adjacent lot and are collaborating with Cunningham, architect Treff LaFleche, and interior designer Jill Litner Kaplan on the next phase of the project: a larger pool house (with complete kitchen), tennis courts, and more landscaped areas with fieldstone paths and walls.



and a garage level built into the downward-sloping lot. By placing the house very near the street (allowable because the property is an "old lot," as defined by local zoning) with the front facade turned north/northwest, he was able to maximize the size of the backyard and give all the rooms that face it a southern exposure.

In that brightness, all the key family living spaces are found. "We live in our kitchen. It's the area where everyone congregates," says the homeowner, who can see the family room, breakfast area, screened porch, and backyard from the vantage point of the kitchen's stunning 11-foot-long granite-topped island. "The kitchen and family room are definitely the heart of the home," says Kaplan, who had worked with the couple on the interior design of their previous house. She injected those spaces with kid-friendly patterns and surfaces, such as ikat fabrics and rugs that are as good for hiding stains as they are for establishing a sophisticated look.

Throughout the first floor, Kaplan layered textures and patterns grounded in a neutral palette of taupe, gray, greige, sea-foam green, and watery blue, adding visual stimulation with everything from the tribal pillow patterns of the media room to the antique suzani-upholstered bench in the entry. It also was important to reuse favorite pieces



DESIGN DECISION

Playful Profile

Architect Treff LaFleche designed the moulding in this house to give it the appearance of traditional trim with a contemporary turn. The stairway baluster exemplifies the balance as the simple shape suggests both classic form and minimalist restraint. A touch of playfulness is present as negative and positive spaces interact. Says LaFleche, "It's like the drawing of the two candlesticks. What are you focusing on — the figure or the void?"



FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1 ENTRY | 12 MUDROOM |
| 2 POWDER ROOM | 13 STAIR HALL |
| 3 DINING ROOM | 14 BEDROOM |
| 4 LIVING ROOM | 15 SITTING ROOM |
| 5 MEDIA ROOM | 16 BATH |
| 6 FAMILY ROOM | 17 MASTER BEDROOM |
| 7 KITCHEN | 18 MASTER CLOSET |
| 8 BREAKFAST AREA | 19 MASTER BATH |
| 9 DINING AREA | 20 OFFICE |
| 10 SCREENED PORCH | 21 GUEST BATH |
| 11 GARAGE | 22 GUEST BEDROOM |

BUILDER
Wellen Construction

from the clients' previous house. "We started the project with the intention of using as much of the existing furniture as possible," says Kaplan, "whether that meant re-upholstering or repurposing furniture to give it a new lease on life." Such transitions were facilitated by the Victorian references LaFleche injected into the architectural details. "The couple wanted two things with inherent differences," he says, "the traditional feeling of their previous late-19th-century house and the contemporary openness of a new house. My solution was to use lots of moulding but with refined profiles that are more monolithic in their character. It's the layering of the moulding that creates grandeur rather than fussiness." Wellen Construction of Marlborough, Massachusetts, expertly executed the plans.

In their old house, children's bedrooms were on different floors. Now, at the owners' request, all bedrooms occupy the same level and

each room has a distinctive ceiling treatment, from the canopy-like effect in the master to the lofted play spaces of the children's rooms.

However, it is the three-season screened porch and the backyard that truly satisfy the owners' wish list. Topped by a copper onion-shaped dome, the porch (which the wife says is her favorite room) has all the comforts of a family space but the rustic character of a vacation house, with cedar walls and ceiling, stone fireplace and floor, and screen panels. Better still, it's a distinctive segue from house to yard, where Cunningham's landscape design provides the rest of the one-house-does-it-all package: a pool, spa, and garden set amid native plant species, evergreen trees, and fieldstone paths and walls. "The idea was to make this as much as possible like a summer place," says the homeowner. Dream home, dream getaway, all in one. ■

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A BALANCE OF WARM traditional and sleek modern is at play throughout the house: 1) The media room has tribal patterns and walnut paneling. 2) The master bathroom's limestone conveys elegance. 3) The master bedroom's dropped ceiling above the bed suggests a canopy. 4) The dining room is designed for gracious dinner parties. 5) In the 17-by-18-foot living room, the curtains, sofa, and chairs are from the previous house. 6) Even the powder room is richly detailed. 7) A constellation-like fixture and double-height arched window add drama at the landing.