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A design team reimagines a Massachusetts Heights home, forging a connection with its majestic parkland setting.

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BY SHARON JAFFE DAN



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*FRENCH*

The home's unassuming stucco façade reveals no sign of the major addition, accessible through the small entry pavilion on the left.

A design team boldly updates a Massachusetts Heights residence while respecting its storied past

# CONNECTION

BY SHARON JAFFE DAN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID BURROUGHS



From the front pavilion, a stone stairway (left, top) leads guests to an arrival courtyard (left, bottom). The glass door opens to an entryway connecting the home's new and old wings. The new family room (pictured here) is set against the backdrop of a stone chimney that once adorned an exterior wall. A floating stairway leads to a home office above; walls sheathed in limestone descend to a new exercise room and wine cellar.





Appreciating an older home requires a special eye. Good things often happen when its owners celebrate its idiosyncracies rather than forcing the home into a conventional mold.

Such was the case for a couple who had recently rebuilt their DC home after a fire. Though they were “not looking,” they came across an online listing in Massachusetts Heights. “I knew the house in a previous incarnation and thought it was the most amazing place ever,” says one spouse, the CEO of a financial software platform company. Modest in size with an unassuming, stucco-clad front façade, the 1940s-era house would not look out of place in a remote French village. The backyard is far more dramatic as it slopes down to forested Rock Creek Park.

The home remained a small cottage for most of its history. Then, in 1999, previous owners renovated and built an addition. The update would later catch the eye of former Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson as well as former Senator Jon Corzine, both of whom have called the residence home.

This couple were also smitten and jumped at the opportunity, despite the property’s obvious quirks. “It’s an upside-down house,”

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 ARCHITECTURE: SCARLETT BREEDING, AIA, principal in charge; SARAH FAVRAO, project architect, Alt Breeding Schwarz Architects, Annapolis, Maryland. INTERIOR DESIGN: HELEN SULLIVAN, Helen Sullivan Design, Washington, DC. LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: KEVIN CAMPION, Campion Hruby Landscape Architects, Annapolis, Maryland. RENOVATION CONSTRUCTION: BRET ANDERSON, president; STEVE MICEK, project manager; Pyramid Builders, Annapolis, Maryland.





The home's existing front door leads to the original foyer (opposite, top) displaying a diptych by New Zealand artist Paula Bianchi. It leads to the master suite and a guest room while stairs to the right access the son's bedroom on the top floor. From the foyer, a stairway brings guests down to the piano lounge (top), which now opens to the addition. The piano lounge adjoins the living room (left), where Helen Sullivan mixed new and antique furnishings. Windows and glass-paneled doors unadorned by drapes spill open to the landscape and expanded terrace (above).



says the CEO, explaining that the main entry opens to the bedroom level, requiring guests to go downstairs to the public rooms. When they bought it, the house lacked a connection between its terraces and the majestic parkland below. It was too dark, the kitchen needed work and there was no family room—a must for the twosome, who had their first child on the way.

Fortunately, they had already assembled a crack design team. Architect Scarlett Breeding; Washington interior designer Helen Sullivan; Bret Anderson, president of Pyramid Builders; and landscape architect Kevin Campion had collaborated on either the owners' post-fire rebuild, their remake of a getaway home on the Chesapeake Bay or both projects. In 2010, these design pros were tasked with adapting this newly acquired home to fit the clients' functional needs and aesthetic while preserving the old-home character that made it so special.

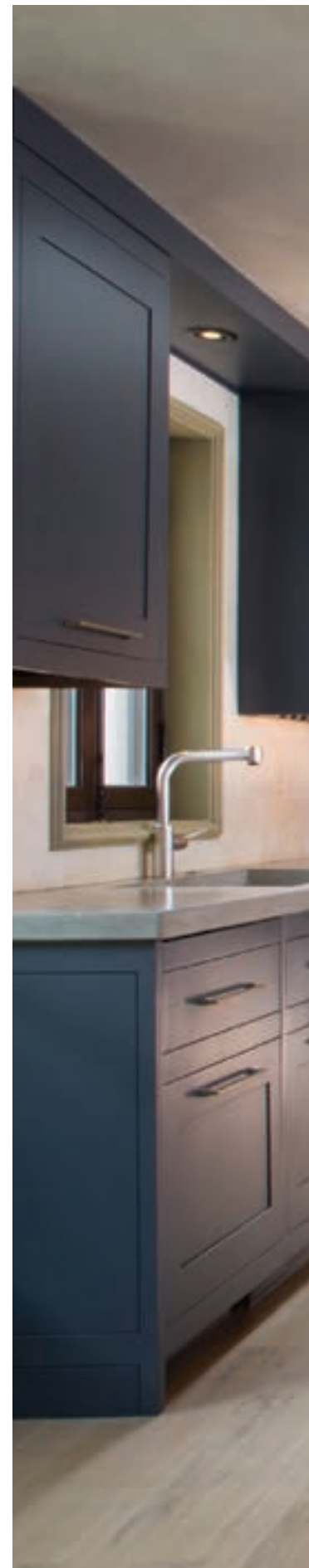
Initially, the conversation focused on adding a family room, but the program evolved into something a bit more ambitious. First, a comprehensive renovation upgraded the existing house, including complete makeovers of the kitchen and bathrooms. Next, Scarlett Breeding masterminded an addition that would remedy many of the home's shortcomings without overwhelming its beguiling façade.

Built into the slope to the left of the main entry, the now-complete, three-story addition is accessible via a small front pavilion. From here, a stairway and an elevator lead down to a light-filled courtyard. Guests then arrive at a glass-enclosed entryway that connects the old and new wings of the house.

To the left of the entry, the addition unfolds. A large, comfortable family room invites visitors to curl up on a sofa and enjoy the



On the north side of the house, a stone stairway with a rustic water feature (above) leads into the newly revamped kitchen (right). Its clean-lined, modern design combines a limestone backsplash, concrete countertops and steel-blue painted cabinetry. In the existing dining room (top), Helen Sullivan re-purposed furniture, a rug and antique mirrors from the owners' previous home. The Valley Craftsmen applied Venetian plaster to all walls in the house, as well as the kitchen ceiling.





“If you’ve had a bad day, you come home and feel like someone threw a big cashmere blanket around you.”

—HOMEOWNER





park view through windows unadorned by draperies. A new fireplace plays off a masonry chimney on the opposing wall; the latter is a remnant from the home's previous exterior. A curved, floating stairway with walls sheathed in limestone leads down to a wine cellar and exercise room. The stairs ascend to a home office with a vaulted skylight that floods the addition with light.

To the right of the glass connector, a piano lounge with a cast-limestone fireplace provides a seamless transition into the pre-addition part of the home. Throughout the residence, a palette of authentic, carefully matched materials—from Venetian plaster on the walls to wooden beams, mahogany window trim and slate shingles—blurs the lines between old and new.

Breeding's bold plan also integrates the home with the landscape. "The first renovation gave the house a very balanced, symmetrical façade on the back. That led us to create this connector so we could repeat the symmetry and proportions," the architect explains. "It connects the point of arrival all the way through the house and down to the garden."

Landscape architect Kevin Campion devised a way to link the existing rear terrace to the landscape below so the owners and their young son could safely navigate and enjoy the grounds. "The previous owners had done nothing with the slope, so we inherited a site that was wild, to say the least," he recalls. Today, a curved stairway flanked by lush gardens connects widened terraces to a

lower terrace off the exercise room and down to the lawn below.

Building the addition and hardscape was no easy feat. "It turned out to be a very delicate dance," says Pyramid's Bret Anderson. "The site provided no access to the rear of house, where a major portion of the work would transpire. Materials and equipment that couldn't be hand-carried had to be craned in.

"Our second major hurdle was replicating the exterior and interior details and maintaining a seamless appearance between new and old," Anderson continues. "The house has a very sophisticated, aged look. Recreating that was a bit of challenge."

The owners, who frequently entertain on a large scale, sought interiors that were comfortable and elegant, yet more contemporary in context than the home's previous style. "We wanted to embrace what was there in a more 'family' way," says one of the spouses, a journalist who works from the addition's new sky-lit office.

Whether their son, now a toddler, is hosting a pumpkin-carving party for his playmates or his parents are throwing a dinner party for 30, the house conveys a welcoming, non-fussy vibe despite its pedigree. Designer Helen Sullivan captured the couple's vision with a mix of newly purchased and antique furnishings and a restful color palette of neutrals and pale greens and blues. Custom treatments—from the leather banquette in the kitchen to the linen-upholstered bedstead in the master suite—impart a sense of relaxed luxury. Colorful modern art collected on the owners' travels adds punch.

Widened terraces (opposite) designed for large-scale entertaining overlook the lawn and Rock Creek Park below (this page). Kevin Campion planted the steep slope with boxwood, river birch, switchgrass and assorted perennials. A retaining wall at the bottom buttresses the landscape while protecting old-growth trees.



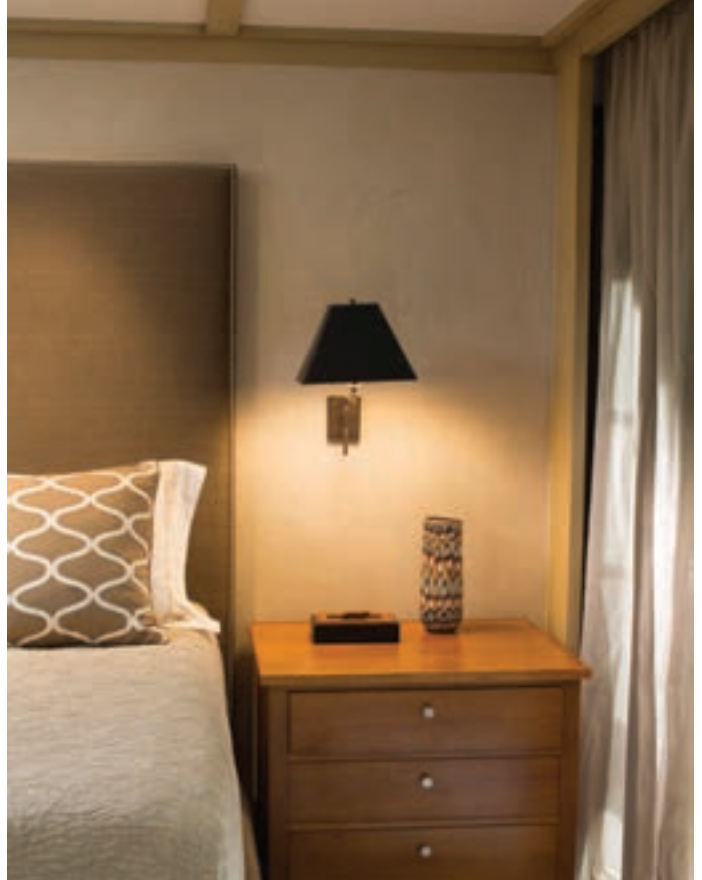


“There is a finery about it, but not an overwhelming formality,” says the CEO of Sullivan’s interior scheme. “If you’ve had a bad day, you come home and feel like someone threw a big cashmere blanket around you.”

While taking cues from its past, the team pushed the home in a more modern direction. The kitchen is clean-lined and crisp, with concrete countertops and steel blue-painted cabinetry playing off the limestone backsplash. Bathrooms boast updated vanities and cutting-edge mirrors and lighting. “You try never to replicate, but

to complement,” says Breeding. “The interior renovation was sympathetic and respected the language of the house, but put it in a very contemporary juxtaposition.” Aside from the romantic gas-lit fixtures that adorn the home’s exterior, there is nothing anachronistic about its latest makeover. A state-of-the-art smart-home system controls everything from music to lighting and security. The “seeded” aggregate front driveway is designed to look old but is heated and boasts a charging port for the couple’s electric car.

Everyone involved attributes the project’s success to a pair of



A chocolate linen bedstead with nailhead trim (above) graces the master suite. A sheer curtain screens the sleeping area from the light-filled sitting room (left), where Donghia chairs are perched for drop-dead views of the woods. An update of the master bath (below) added a modern vanity topped with honed limestone.



dream clients as well as the caliber of the design team and its spirit of collaboration. The same team is now busy designing a new waterfront escape for the couple near Annapolis. It will be ultra-modern—in marked contrast to this DC gem that has a style all its own. “It looks like a teeny French or Italian villa from the front,” Helen Sullivan marvels, “but in the house, you feel its expansiveness.” ❖

*David Burroughs is a photographer in Annapolis.*

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A rear view reveals the three-story addition on the right. The exercise room opens to a lower terrace where a custom, stainless-steel hot tub by Diamond Spas is built into the stone. In the older wing of the house, the living room is topped by the master suite and the son's bedroom above.

