



A cobbled patio leads visitors to the house, which boasts a low profile, as seen from the front (opposite). A wall of steel windows in the breakfast bay (this page) reveals a picturesque landscape by Lila Fendrick.

Designed by Anne Decker, a Bethesda home blends traditional and modern elements — and beautifully complements its setting



Perfect
HARMONY

By JULIE SANDERS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM ARBAN



In the venerable Edgemoor neighborhood of Bethesda, the most successful new homes combine fine architecture with a sense of belonging. Houses on these quiet streets lined with mature trees do not look alike—but their eclectic styles and range of eras harmonize amidst lush landscaping. There are very few sore thumbs here.

A recently completed home by Anne Decker is no exception. When the architect was tapped to build a new house for longtime Edgemoor residents Linda Mann and her husband, one of the clients' directives was "a home that would fit into the neighborhood," Decker says. "They wanted to be good neighbors."

The couple with three grown children were downsizing from a much larger home nearby. An attractive stone house already occupied the lot they'd bought, but it had been poorly maintained and they were forced to tear it down. Mann ultimately embraced this turn of events. "It was exciting in that we got the experience of designing a new house and working with Anne," she says.

The homeowner and architect hit it off immediately and were soon "finishing each other's sentences," Mann says, laughing. Decker understood her client's vision right away. Formerly an

ARCHITECTURE: ANNE Y. DECKER, AIA, lead architect, and JOSHUA MOHR, AIA, LEED Green Associate, Anne Decker Architects, Bethesda, Maryland.
 CONTRACTOR: Potomac Valley Builders, Bethesda, Maryland. LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE: LILA FENDRICK, Lila Fendrick Landscape Architects, Chevy Chase, Maryland.



A deep archway connects the entry and living room (opposite), where neutral colors ensure that the view is the main attraction. Beyond the living room windows at the back of the house, a small slate patio beckons (above), while the side elevation looks out to a larger patio area (top).





Linda Mann, a former interior designer, repurposed furniture from her previous home in the living room (these pages). She considered room dimensions carefully in order to accommodate such pieces as a massive 19th-century library table, which stands against one wall.



In the airy, white kitchen (this page), steel windows showcase views of the garden. The large space accommodates a formal dining table at one end. Windows above the sink overlook a stucco-clad outdoor fireplace designed by Fendrick. It's a focal point on the slate patio (opposite), which also boasts a built-in grill.

“Everywhere you look there’s a window that pulls the outside in.” —ANNE DECKER



The homeowners relax and watch TV in a cozy office/den (opposite); a painting by William Miller brings color to the room’s subdued palette. Decker designed a gracefully curved staircase in the entry (below). The archway, which leads into the living room (left), conceals a jib door accessing the basement.



interior designer, Mann favored crisp lines, walls of steel-framed windows with an industrial vibe and rooms sized to accommodate her collection of antiques, art and heirlooms.

She also envisioned a house that wouldn’t overwhelm its site. “We didn’t want to loom over anybody,” she says. In response to this preference, Decker designed an undulating roofline that combines gables with flat-roof expanses. This design partially conceals the home’s second story, which houses three bedrooms, giving the impression of a less imposing abode. It also communicates a more modern aesthetic.

“Linda appreciates both traditional and modern design,” Decker explains. “So I took a traditional look and distilled it to incorporate both.”

She embraced a pared-down sensibility for the 4,100-square-foot home, inspired by the Bauhaus movement of 1920s Germany with its industrial flavor and clean lines. Her “distilled traditional” design reduces classical forms to their essence in terms of massing and interior details. “We like to juxtapose elements so you appreciate one for the other,” she explains. For example, trim-less windows and exterior doors contrast with the interior doors, which boast high-gloss black paint and dressy, eye-catching hardware.

Inside, traditional architectural elements are rendered with a minimalist hand. The ceilings favor plain, painted-oak beams over coffers and in the kitchen, the beams have been distilled to “just a drywall articulation,” Decker says. In the deep archway that connects the front hall to the living room, glossy millwork clads the interior of the opening, but trim has been left off. The millwork cleverly conceals basement stairs and a coat closet behind jib doors

that disappear when closed. “We didn’t want to be distracted in the foyer by lots of doors, so we hid them when we could,” the architect comments.

Heeding Mann’s wish for abundant natural light, Decker designed 10-foot-four-inch ceilings that convey an airy feel, with nine-foot doorways in the public rooms. Strong axial alignments in the layout mean that “everywhere you look there’s a window that pulls the outside in,” Decker says. Steel-framed windows and doors by British manufacturer Crittall frame views of the side and back yards.

The landscape design by Lila Fendrick mirrors the home’s aesthetic. “We made it subtle to showcase the house and create privacy,” she explains. Each set of windows in back looks out to its own garden view and has its own privacy hedge. Layers of plantings including holly, arborvitae, crape myrtle and magnolia conceal the property from the bordering side street and the house behind.

When it came to decorating the interiors, Mann let the architecture dictate her direction. “I found that the house almost fought me,” she observes bemusedly. “Every time I tried to bring in more color, I had to back it off.” The result was a subdued palette of grays, oatmeals and whites, complementing natural materials like hand-hewn, limed-oak floors and stonework.

“Everything defers to the outside,” Decker comments. “The views are so important, we didn’t want to distract from them.”

Mann took pains regarding the room dimensions, ensuring such key pieces as a massive 19th-century library table fit comfortably into the living room. “We practically designed the whole space around it,” Mann recalls. “I was not parting with that table!” Sofas and chairs were reupholstered and artwork carefully showcased.



The master bedroom (these pages) is a restful retreat, with a four-poster bed and a carpet from C.G. Coe & Son. The adjoining master bath (opposite) features a Calacatta Gold marble double vanity with waterfall sides and a soaking tub from Americh.



The kitchen was designed by Decker around a large island with plenty of work space. White custom cabinetry is topped with two-inch-thick Imperial Danby marble counters, and above the island, oversized pendants by Kay Douglass add drama. In lieu of a formal dining room, the breakfast bay at one end of the spacious kitchen is fitted out with an elegant dining room table. A wall of windows overlooks a stucco-clad outdoor fireplace of Fendrick's design. Mann loves the view from this spot. "It's a beautiful space by the table looking out," she says. "You feel really good in it, with the windows all around." ❖

Photographer Tom Arban is based in Toronto.

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