

ANNE DECKER ARCHITECTS

TAKING INSPIRATION FROM CLIENTS' EXISTING BUILDINGS RESULTS IN TIMELESS DESIGN

by Frederick Jerant

UNLIKE SOME FIRMS, Anne Decker Architects doesn't have a signature style. Instead, the company draws on an existing structure's lines and design cues to create complementary effects. "We take a rigorous approach to design and detailing and always want to be sensitive to the home's scale and surroundings," Decker says. "The key is to make a beautiful home that's also comfortable. Often we'll take design cues from the house itself if it has good bones. Our goal is to create places that are beautiful, comfortable, and of high quality."

Anne Decker Architects specializes in the design of well-crafted homes and additions that enhance their surroundings and sense of place. Nationally recognized, Decker's award-winning projects have been featured in *Period Homes*, *New Old House*, *Architectural Digest*, *Residential Architect*, and *Custom Home* magazines. With over 20 years of experience, Decker and her team closely collaborate with each client to realize their visions of home.

The designer focuses on high-end custom homes in the Washington, DC, metro area—but she doesn't shy away from commercial projects. "A number of my residential clients have asked me to design for their businesses," she says, noting such names as Seth Goldman, owner of Honest Tea. The firm is also designing the offices of a local law firm and renovating a French cooking school and an animal hospital.

Typically, Anne Decker Architects has about 30 projects on the books at any one time, ranging in size. Decker forges strong relationships with her clients, and most of her business comes from referrals from previous projects. "That's why I need to do very little advertising," she says.

The full-scale architectural firm provides everything from initial feasibility studies to construction administration. "We walk through the program with our clients, room by room, and discuss in depth how they see using each space,"

Decker says. "We encourage them to bring images of spaces they like so we can exchange ideas.

"They might not know exactly what they want, but the shared images can paint a good picture of their likes more than words can. It's a great way to ensure they get what they want."

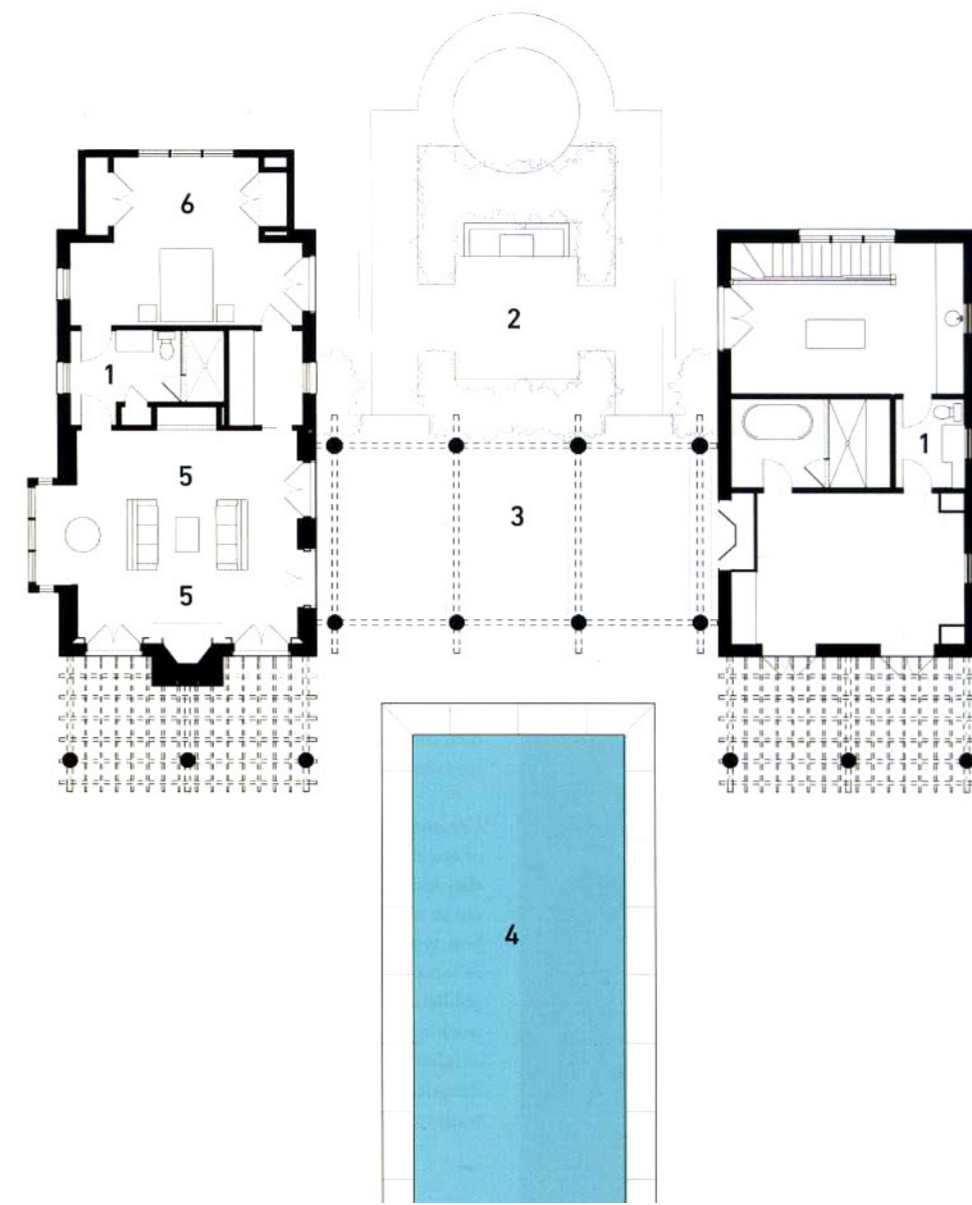
When possible, Decker turns to natural materials such as stone, wood, and copper, much of it reclaimed. "We like to use heart pine or quarter-sawn oak flooring that [is] often found in old houses and barns," she says. "There's nothing like the patina of old wood."

Contrasting textures and finishes—shiny and dull, smooth and rough, wood and stone—accent her designs. "Their juxtaposition contributes to the overall look and celebration of each design element," she says. Her clients might not note every detail, but the overall look can indeed be greater than the sum of the parts.



Top Design Elements of the Potomac Retreat Residence

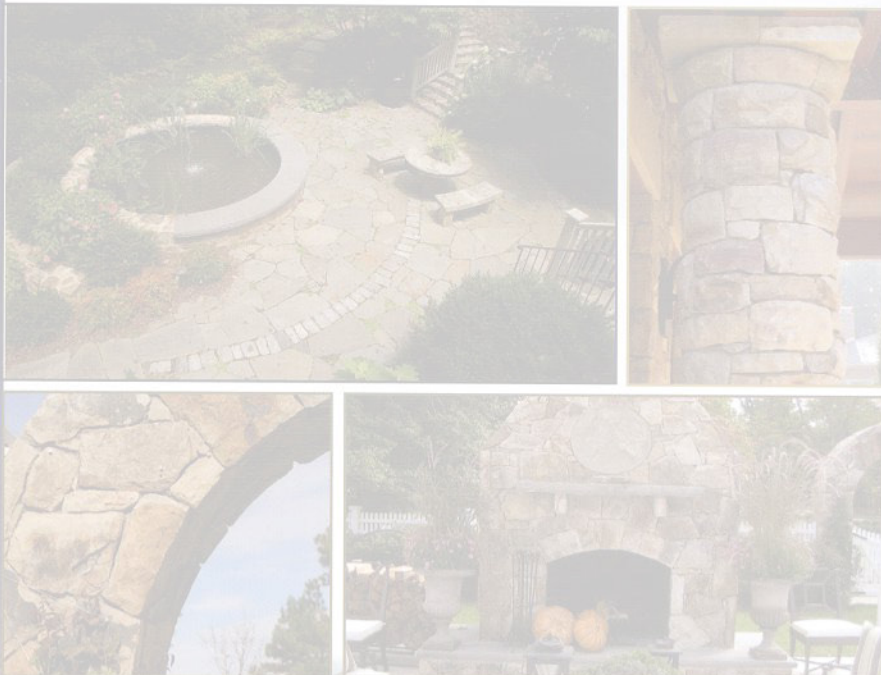
- 1. Oversize doors:** Although the 9-foot-high interior and exterior entries share the same basic elements, mirrors and other detailing add a twist.
- 2. Intricate stonework:** It is a continuing motif on the walls and columns, whether indoors or outdoors.
- 3. Mahogany beams:** These are used in the arbor, as well as in various interior elements, as a way to draw the interior to the exterior and vice versa.
- 4. Classically detailed stone columns:** These visually reinforce the buildings and ground them to the site.
- 5. Oversize precast fireplaces:** Two of them—one anchoring the guesthouse's 12-foot ceiling, the other a focal point of the outdoor dining area—speak to the precast sills and lintels.



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Serra Stone Corporation

Serra Stone is a full-service masonry company in Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia. From stone veneer to stone walkways, from retaining walls to patios, from excavation to drainage systems, from small jobs to large-scale residential and commercial projects, Serra Stone delivers quality, service and excellence in stone masonry.



Completed in 2009, the firm's Potomac Retreat project in Potomac, Maryland, was created for a busy professional couple who sought—right next door—a resort-like refuge from the hurly-burly of daily life.

The pair's new 1,800-square-foot home includes a guesthouse, pool house, covered dining area, and outdoor living space. It features two wings—one private, the other more public—which flank the partially covered courtyard and dining terrace and create an intimate outdoor setting. The dedicated guest area includes a living room, dining room, kitchenette, and sleeping area while the public portion includes a pool house with a spa, exercise area, and workshop.

The husband wanted a more traditional "aged" look while the wife preferred contemporary stylings. The result is an interesting hybrid. Stone buildings suggest Old World artistry and stability and visually strengthen the relationship between the house and the lush landscaping surrounding both properties. The structures are traditional with classical (though large—doors are 9 feet high) proportions, and they create an ideal setting for strolling through the garden or entertaining large groups.

More contemporary touches include an arbor that has very simple forms and detailing, clean lines and sleek finishes on much of the interior cabinetry, and forward-looking furnishings throughout. The arbor's expressed mahogany beams set a motif that repeats in the split Western Maryland stone veneer pavilions and inside the guesthouse. This outside-to-inside concept continues with large windows inset, huge mahogany-framed French doors, and the extensive use of stone—such as quartzite/sandstone from Utah's Mountain Valley—on exterior and interior surfaces.

"Creating a home is a highly personal expression of our clients' dreams and aspirations and the way they live," Decker says. "We try to be good listeners so we can create a house that not only balances beauty and function but also is comfortable and reflects their lives." On every project, the highly publicized designer takes a collaborative approach, working closely with her client, an in-house team of talented architects, and an array of consultants, designers, builders, and artisans. "It takes a great team to make a project sing," she says. ■

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