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Turning Back the Clock

Ultra Contemporary is Yesterday's News *By Susan Pevaroff Berschler*

Modern and minimalist, the edgy contemporary home Bob and Barbara built in the '70s reflected the times—and the young couple's tastes. But after three decades, these empty nesters felt the pull of a softer, gentler design era, so they decided to celebrate the next phase of their lives surrounded by Old World tradition. With its stone exterior and sumptuous, warm interiors, their new home could not be a more radical departure from their former dwelling.

And yet, they never actually departed.

Instead of joining friends flocking into Center City or downsizing into suburban adult communities, Bob and Barbara picked up the phone to contact architect Rene Hoffman and designer Barbara Eberlein. Armed

with Bob's daring vision and a shared spirit of adventure, the couple resolved to reinvent their home—and lifestyle—on the Villanova property they have always loved. "As your life within a particular space evolves, you start to see other possibilities," says Eberlein. "They both felt that with a little reevaluation and imagination this house could be modified to accommodate their needs today as well as it did 30 years ago."

And so began a unique design journey, more reincarnation than renovation. The only unchanged detail is the address.

One has but to pull into the driveway to experience the effect of the dramatic metamorphosis. Gone is the angular structure with its rough cedar siding. In its stead: intricate stonework and an architectural outline reminiscent of a gracious English country manor. The significantly altered façade is, well, exactly that. The new exterior was actually built right over the existing structure. "The stone adds centuries, creating the look of a much older home," explains Eberlein. And the deception hardly ends there. The facade is three stories high, making the home appear larger. "It really is just an illusion. There is no third-story living space," smiles Eberlein. Out of necessity, the new does intersect with the old at critical junctures like doors and windows, but otherwise, the newly conceived form is comparable to a free standing sculpture. It's just attached to a house. Translating the concept into a feasible reality was as complicated as it sounds. "It was a tremendous and courageous undertaking that totally changed the character of this house," emphasizes Eberlein.

Almost as challenging—and equally stunning in impact—is the infusion of architectural personality into a starkly contemporary interior, defined by the conspicuous absence of detail. "Barbara wanted warmth and charm, a more personal ambiance," explains Eberlein. "So we added





it all: the columns, moldings, millwork, fireplaces, you name it. Basically they are living in a new house. They just didn't have to move."

As for furnishings, there was definitely some shopping to do. Consider the former living room. "The living room was an absolute riot of 1970's design thought with its multiple levels of carpeted platforms instead of actual furniture," recalls Eberlein. "It was just one big empty adult rumpus room and for many years they loved it. But as their tastes changed, they thought it would be nice to sit in a chair," she jokes.

Working in a motif she calls "gently English," Eberlein chose design elements to complement Barbara and Bob's lifestyle of casual elegance. "I knew they wanted to maintain the degree of casualness they had in their former house, so the new lines are traditional, but the fabrics are not terribly overdone or fussy," she notes. "Now that they have grown kids and grandchildren, they wanted a setting that was upscale but still welcoming and comfortable."

When it came to addressing the home's endless sea of white walls, Eberlein knew her clients well enough to know what they didn't want.

"They are just not blue people," she laughs. Instead it is a palette of rich reds, greens and creams that are juxtaposed and varied in balance from room to room, maintaining a color continuity that is never boring. The diehard color devotee is as pleased as her clients. "Color enriches spaces and it grounds them," she explains. "People often think the white, on white, on white, on white is going to make the space look bigger. It doesn't. In fact, without points of distinction to direct your eye, the space can actually appear smaller than it is." Beyond redefining spatial perspective, deeper wall tones have enhanced the effect of an extensive art collection, a critical issue for Barbara who is an art dealer by profession.

"It is the same collection displayed on a very different background and there is nothing off putting about the colors, patterns, textures or variations in lighting," says Eberlein. "This art looked beautiful on stark white walls and it looks even more beautiful now."

The transformation of existing spaces is only one facet of this design drama. The piece de resistance is the two-story addition in the back. Upstairs: a gigantic, ultra luxe master suite, with fantasy worthy closets, spacious sitting room, and his-and-her bathrooms connected by a state-of-the-art glass shower. Downstairs: An intimate bar/lounge, perfect for adult gatherings, which leads into the ultimate grandchild magnet; the fully outfitted media room, featuring a popcorn machine and a candy counter.

"The spaces were added that would really attract and engage their children and grandchildren," says Eberlein. "When you come over for holidays you see them all snuggled in the media room watching movies together. The changes have really impacted their lifestyle in a wonderful way."

Acknowledging the huge scope and complexity of this ultimate makeover, Eberlein is quick to point out that there are many ways to accommodate changing needs and tastes that do not require a commitment of this magnitude. "You could apply the same principles to a much smaller scale and perhaps use less exotic materials. Absolutely consider all the options," she urges. "Houses are endlessly flexible and translatable. Sometimes you just need a different point of view."

The bottom line: The more you want things to stay the same, the more you may need to change. IS

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