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High-Impact DESIGN

Custom finishes and amenities abound in this newly renovated mansion on the Potomac

By Catherine Applefeld Olson

Photography by James Tetro

A Eurofase chandelier hangs from the barrel ceiling in the foyer (opposite). In the living room (pictured here), four Ingo Maurer pendants make a bold statement. The coffee tables are from Holly Hunt and the rug is by Tai Ping Carpets.

Most remodeling projects begin with structural elements and wind up with interior design. Others, such as the overhaul of this glorious 18,000-square-foot home in McLean, Virginia, are driven by their interiors. The result is a layering of surprising elements that surface like a gift box being unwrapped for the first time.

"This home was definitely designed from the inside out, from the interiors to the architecture," says architect David Cooper, a principal at ACG who was hired to design the renovation. "In a lot of cases the architect would have a strong role in definition and scale of spaces, but here the challenge was how to achieve the objectives of the interior designer. We were given design documents, not construction documents, and had to figure out AV, HVAC—all those elements—around the design."

The objectives of Los Angeles-based interior designer Joan Behnke, whom the new homeowner tapped to realize his vision, centered around a bit of a dichotomy: Due to his work, he would frequently be entertaining on a large scale, so the home needed to have gracious public spaces. But as a young man who enjoys kicking back in his leisure time, he sought ample casual private quarters where he could relax and spend time with family and friends.

"The other criteria was that he loved quality," says Behnke. "He wanted the home to reflect a kind of classical contemporary approach with a focus on custom items." In order to achieve the desired results, the remodel would have to morph from what was initially envisioned as a quick turnaround into a major redesign in which virtually every floor, wall and ceiling was altered and customized.

"Essentially the client was on the fast track, but when we were opening things up there was an opportunity to take it to a different level, and he was willing to wait," Behnke says.

RENOVATION ARCHITECTURE: DAVID COOPER, ACG Architects, McLean, Virginia. **CONTRACTOR:** BOWA, McLean, Virginia. **INTERIOR DESIGN:** JOAN BEHNKE, Joan Behnke & Associates Interior Design, Los Angeles, California.

A different level, indeed. The home, which is built into a hill, encompasses four floors including a main level with expansive gathering spaces and a large working kitchen, which was completely gutted and remodeled to accommodate multiple refrigerators and dishwashers and ample counter space. The home's lower "layers" contain more casual entertaining spaces, guest rooms, a second kitchen and a luxurious master suite and bath. Many of the rooms were upgraded with dramatic ceiling architecture, including the living room and the upstairs office, which is canopied by a barrel ceiling.

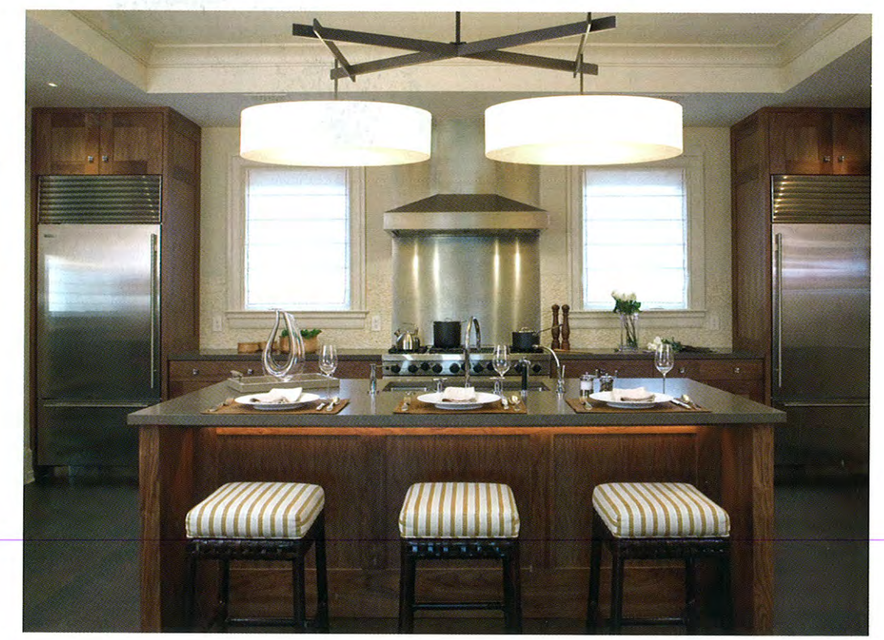
Making the most of the home's views of the Potomac River was as important as the remodel itself. Nowhere is this more evident than in the new exercise room. The space, formerly occupied by several guest rooms with only scant small windows, is now a spacious gym and adjacent spa that seem to float in the foliage over the river like a tree house. A wall of windows that are retractable at points and a balcony edged by glass rails offer unobstructed views.

Back inside, the eye is drawn to a treasure trove of details, some small and some larger than life. Take, for instance, the massive wall-mounted aquarium that presides over the billiard room. The colorful saltwater tank, which had to be craned in, is surrounded by custom carpentry that mirrors the millwork in the adjacent media room and is maintained by equipment housed below in a separate 10-by-20-foot room.

"By the time we got to this stage, we'd blown all the conventional notions of designing and building apart. So we said, 'You want an aquarium? We'll give you an aquarium,'" Cooper recalls with a chuckle. "It's all about the wow factor, all about impact with this house. We also accommodated a 108-inch TV in the media room, so we needed to figure out a way of integrating that into a piece of millwork that had eight coats of enamel on it. It brings a whole different range of adjectives to mind."

Given the level of sophistication and involvement of different vendors, "Everyone wanted to be the last one in the house," notes Patricia Tetro, vice president of BOWA, which acted as the contractor and central point of accountability for the

Pendants by Satori Light Sculptures appear to float in the family room (left). A breakfast room on the main level (above), with a custom table and occasional chairs, overlooks the wooded grounds. The service kitchen (below) is equipped with multiple refrigerators, dishwashers and ample counter space.



"It's all about the wow factor, all about impact with this house." —DAVID COOPER

Among the many challenges facing BOWA during the renovation was the construction of a large saltwater aquarium in the billiard room (above). Its surrounding millwork mirrors the cabinetry in the adjacent media room (opposite). The team integrated a 108-inch TV into the space, decorated with a custom sofa and ottomans and a sculptural iron table by Philip Nimmo.

project. "It was a come early, stay late kind of project." More than a sum of its parts, the home evolved into an elegant, classical contemporary space that complemented the homeowner's growing collection of artwork, with a warm neutral palette that suited his lifestyle.

With the arrival of custom furnishings from floor to ceiling, the home began to exude a delightful mix of international flavors. This global warming is particularly resonant in the dining room, which houses cabinets constructed in Japan, Italian mirrors and a rug made in the Philippines, among other elements. "There was a real harmony; it expresses globalization in a very positive way," Behnke says.

"For me, the most satisfying thing was to have dinner with the client after he moved in," she adds. "He was so comfortable and at ease in his home. To me, that was the key to knowing it worked." ❖

Writer Catherine Applefeld Olson is based in Alexandria, Virginia. James Tetro is a Vienna, Virginia–based photographer.

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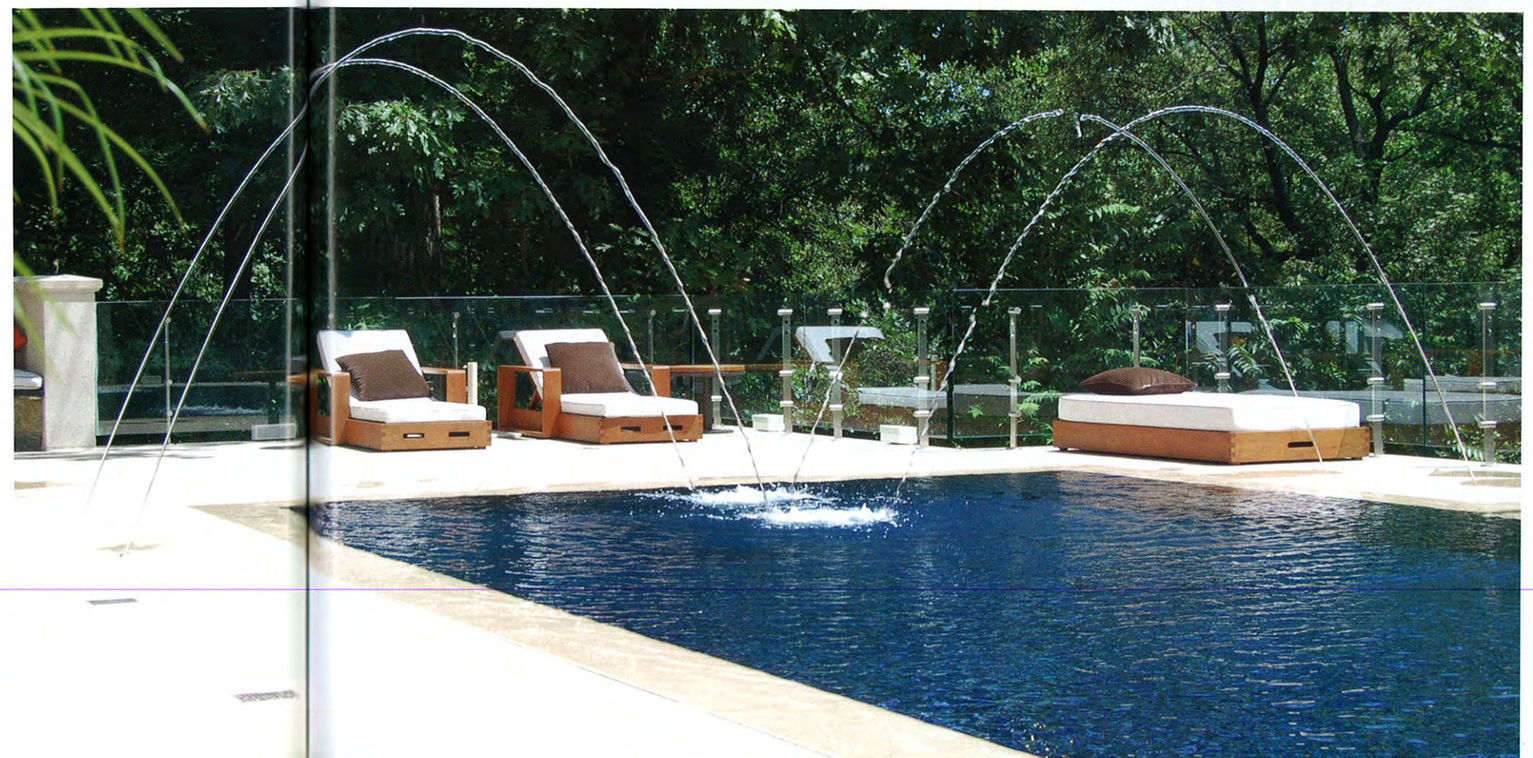
For before photos, visit HomeandDesign.com

On the lower level, former guest rooms were converted into a spacious gym (above) with a wall of windows overlooking the Potomac River. The owner's personal kitchen (opposite) features CaesarStone countertops and a custom dining table. He frequently entertains guests in a pool cabana room (below, left) which opens to the pool (below, right) designed by architect David Cooper and built by Lewis Aquatech.