

Local builder recognized for challenging renovation project

By JOHN BYRD

Home Front News Service

Site development, landscaping challenges and the acquisition of dozens of special building materials were among the tasks required of McLean, Va.'s, BOWA Builders in completing the 2,000 square foot addition to a 1930s Tudor residence in Bethesda, Md.

The comprehensive project lead to BOWA Builder being named Contractor of the Year by the National Association of the Remodeling Industry for an addition more than \$250,000.

The owner's goal was to completely transform of the house — creating a substantially larger residence with all the charm of the original.

Starting with plans by Wash-

ington architect Amy Weinstein that dated back to the mid-1980s, the project had proceeded through three stages.

Now the largest and most complex phase came into view and the contractor was asked to execute ideas that have been percolating among a team of designers and landscapers for more than a decade.

Plans called for a two-story, 2,000 square-foot chateau-like rear addition. There would be 15-foot ceilings and a Rumford box limestone fireplace on the top level. There also would be multiple ground-level entrances to a terraced garden.

Rounding out the wish list, the owners also sought a lap pool and a lily pond; and they wanted it all to look like it was there from the

beginning of a grand original structure.

The site, however, posed a gaping problem — the lot had a 45-degree drop off in the back yard. Headed by Steve Kirstein, BOWA's team immediately saw the project as a logistical challenge that required careful planning amid the confines of a mature neighborhood.

The key would be a series of retaining walls constructed prior to laying the foundation which would modulate the tolerances available in the various terraced sections. The courtyard, the lap pool area, the garden section and, of course, the critical "new ground" supporting the addition

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— all had separate soil compaction requirements.

The first step: a "hillside excavation" some 15 feet below the footing of the existing structure, followed by a buildup of new ground to support the foundation of the new wing. Fifteen feet below that level, a second excavation and fill operation would create a terrace for the lap pool and garden works. Incidental decorative terraces would complete the effect.

But solving the engineering issues only turned up the heat on the addition itself.

On the main floor a living room with an adjacent dining room would be suffused with light by exact window placement, hanging fixtures and a cathedral ceiling. To one side, a set of French doors, identical to the windows, open onto a small garden terrace, leading to a patio and then the lily pond.

The lower level has a pool room with two sets of doors leading to the courtyard and (a few steps down) to the lap pool, which is the center of casual family fun.

Extraordinary attention was now brought to bear on the architect's exterior design speci-



The Bethesda, Md., renovation project earned BOWA Builders Contractor of the Year award.

cations and an interior design plan by Marcia Hayman that required careful research in the selection of materials as well as finely detailed craftsmanship.

A few of the details include:

■ Redwood siding that was hand-milled to match the oldest sections of the home;

■ Vermont slate roof individually selected and then laid out to blend with the multicolored,

aged-effect of the existing roof slates;

■ Limestone facing for the fireplace, which was hand-carved at the Texas quarry site to create a curved profile identi-

cal to that used in the ceiling mouldings;

■ All interior crown and casing treatments were custom-milled to accentuate original molding used in prior renovations; likewise, the new mahogany French doors and arched windows were specially built to complement the custom front door installed in the 1950s;

■ Joint tolerances for all woodwork and casements were specified at 1/32 of an inch or less; even the HVAC diffusers were hand-carved.

The project's crowning achievement may be the new copper snow eagles, perched on the slate roof.

Before purchase, these ornamental avalanche inhibitors — discontinued in the 1930s — were subjected to UV-ray analysis to make sure that they would age to the same rustic hues as their 70-year-old brethren.

The effect of the finished product is of a smallish older home undetectably remade as an elegant manor house and its snugly custom-fitted urban estate.

"I think we achieved what our clients were looking for," Kirstein said. "But I also think we fulfilled a potential — given the site conditions — the original builders would have thought impossible — and I think they'd be pleased with the results."