

Contractor of the Year Awards



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## An Elegant Bethesda Makeover

*A Bethesda couple takes on site challenges to create a dream home, which won a Contractor of the Year award in the category of Whole-House Renovation Over \$1 million*

By Tracy Mitchell Griggs

Photography by Bob Narod

**S**hould we stay or should we go? That question was recently raised for a Bethesda, Maryland, couple when they decided to remodel their 5,000-square-foot, traditional-style production home that had been built for them in 1991. At one point during the process, the couple considered building a new house in another location, but ties to their friends and neighborhood were factors in the final decision to move ahead with the renovation. The home's location in a Glen Echo neighborhood just a mile from Washington, DC, was also key in their decision to stay in the residence as the family enjoys the proximity to DC cultural events and activities.

The site conditions presented the kind of challenge that few architects or builders are willing to take on, but BOWA Builders, Inc., of McLean, Virginia, and the Bethesda firm of

*Architect:* Mark Kramer, Kramer Architects, Bethesda, Maryland

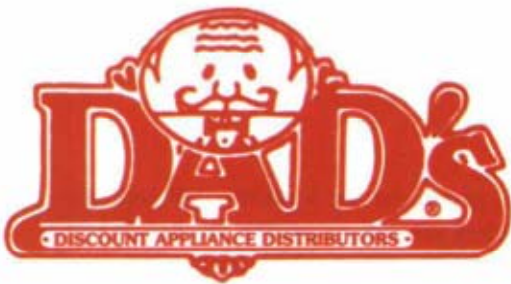
*Contractor:* BOWA Builders, Inc., McLean, Virginia

*Landscape Architect:* Andy Balderson, Donovan, Feola, Balderson & Associates, Inc., Montgomery Village, Maryland

*Landscape Contractor:* Denny Sisson, Sisson Landscaping, Great Falls, Virginia

*Architectural Blacksmith:* Stan Yoder, Windy Hill Forge, Nokesville, Virginia

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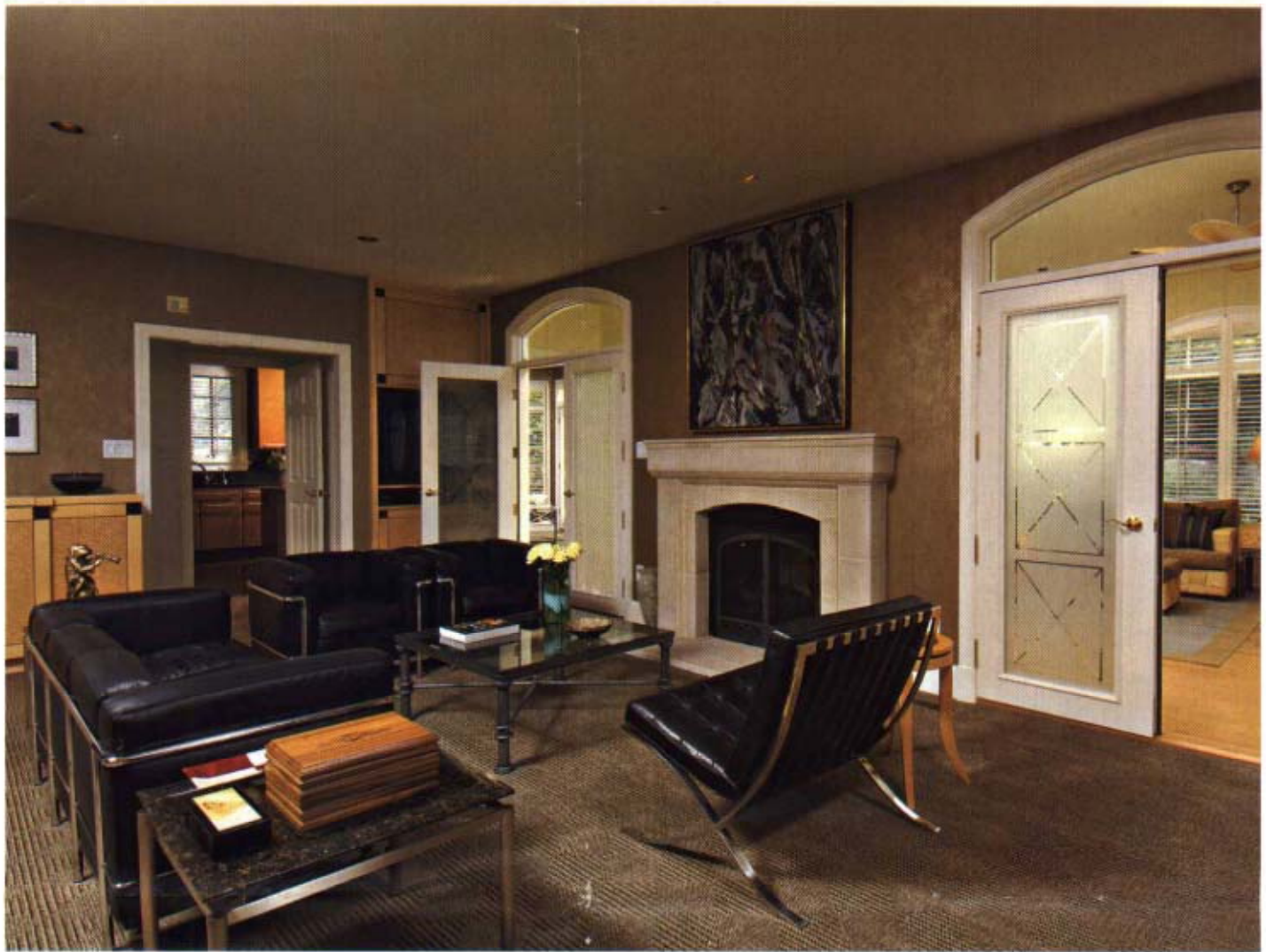
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The project created a new four-car garage and a new elevated entry porch (opposite) on the original home (opposite, inset). Stan Yoder of Windy Hill Forge created the custom architectural bronze banisters and railings for the front hall entrance and second-floor overlook (this page). A 24-karat gold leaf finish was used on the circular insets.





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Kramer Architects were hired to tackle the project. Architect Mark Kramer told the couple he would be able to solve the trickier problems associated with the extreme limitations of the home’s site to accommodate their wish list.

The architect’s confidence and vision, along with the couple’s faith, were amply rewarded and the stunning result netted the remodeled home a coveted CotY Award in the category of Whole-House Renovation Over \$1 million in 2005 by the Metro DC chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI). NARI awards are given annually to building industry professionals in recognition of superior achievement in construction and design. The local chapter has submitted the home to NARI for regional and national award consideration.

“A tight corner lot and steep hill at the rear of the home

presented the most serious challenges and pushed construction literally to within a half-inch of site restrictions,” said BOWA principal Steve Kirstein. During the course of the rear excavation, smaller equipment was required and put into position by large cranes and supplies were carted manually. The architect’s previous posts with local zoning boards and complete familiarity with the ordinances proved instrumental in managing details during the design and construction process, especially as rebuilding the home demanded extensive use of the front yard.

Plans for an expanded, four-car garage resulted in the creation of a repositioned front entrance to the side of the home. A new elevated, covered porch is now the home’s focal point. Featured elements of the new entrance include a Carderock (a locally quarried stone) and flagstone stair-



In the former music room, a renovated fireplace with its limestone hearth and surround creates a modern, clean line (opposite). Two sets of French doors with arch-topped transoms lead to the new sunroom-breakfast area (above).

way flanked by tall stone pillars topped with traditional white columns. Stan Yoder, local artist and owner of Windy Hill Forge, Inc., created the custom iron railings that grace the steps. Low stone piers at the base of the steps are topped with decorative urns overflowing with colorful annuals. A flowering crape myrtle, a tall Nellie Stevens holly and a Japanese lace leaf maple surround and help soften the entrance. The home now welcomes visitors with its beautifully polished appearance.

A graceful, circular drive created using cobblestone pavers complements the renovated garage and entrance. "The circular drive now helps separate the entrance and garage functions—the previous design forced people to walk past the garage to access the front door," architect Kramer stated. The owners agree that the new design and

landscaping have created a much more gracious appearance to the front of the house.

The original brick exterior was painted to complement the Carderock, also used as a finish material for the garage and rear addition. Siding was removed and replaced with a hard coat stucco system and DuraSlate and copper were chosen as roofing material. Selected materials create an Old World feeling and help lend the type of character and charm not typically associated with most production homes. Rooflines were also minimized to balance the expansion of the residence toward the street.

Driving the renovation were the husband's many hobbies and the couple's growing art collection. The retired businessman is a film buff, and collector of wine, vintage cars and classical and jazz albums. "At last count," he estimated,



The new octagonal piano room boasts a vaulted cathedral ceiling (opposite top and inset). In the kitchen, dated cabinets (inset, right) were replaced and an awkward floor plan was streamlined to create a beautifully functional and contemporary space (above) with an oversized granite-topped island and Birdseye maple cabinets.



he had "around eleven thousand discs. I needed a lot more space. My wife, who is an avid design enthusiast, gave me free reign over the garage and our new home theater room, but the remaining rooms were all hers!" He now has space in the former music room to store his record collection in custom cabinetry.

Interior plans expanded the inside wall space to accommodate the large-scale 20th-century abstract expressionism paintings the couple collects. Also incorporated into the 2,200-square-foot addition are a renovated kitchen, an eating area-sunroom, a piano room and a larger master bedroom closet. Extensive landscaping

and lighting, a renovated master dressing area and bath, an exercise room, a home theater and a whole-house generator were eventually added to complete the 18-month renovation.

The couple, their 11-year old son and a Boykin spaniel named Penny stayed in the home during the entire renovation. "The BOWA people were just fantastic and accommodated us during the project. Penny made a few friends with the construction workers, especially around lunchtime," the husband recalled.

The basic footprint of the entrance hall including the staircase was not changed, but dazzling custom Roman patina-finished architectural bronze banisters and railings now frame the staircase and continue to the second floor. Stan Yoder of Windy Hill Forge executed the design, created by the homeowner's wife. A marble floor in the foyer complements the dramatic banister detail.



A few steps from the entry hall is the existing music room, which shares a fireplace (preserved during the renovation) with the new sunroom and dining area directly opposite. New limestone hearths and surrounds reflect the contemporary style of furnishings and accessories in both rooms, accessed through a set of doors flanking the fireplace. Frosted glass insets feature a motif also found on glass cabinet fronts in the kitchen. Skylights in the sunroom shower the room with plenty of natural light and pale bamboo floors contribute to the room's sunny appeal.

The couple wanted a separate piano room for their son, who studies classical music. The new piano room is entered from the sunroom and its octagonal shape creates a focal point at the property's corner. A vaulted cathedral ceiling lends drama to the space while arch-topped windows and bamboo floor details carry over from the adjoining sunroom.

Just off the entrance hall and adjacent to an existing dining room is the newly renovated kitchen. The couple want-



ed a more stylized look to complement the rest of the house, and the wife, who loves to cook, desired a better floor plan. A J-shaped counter and work area were removed and replaced with an oversized granite-topped island with prep sink providing ample seating and functionality for the family. Appliance locations were configured to provide optimal workflow. The warm Birdseye maple cabinets with brushed steel pulls provide contrast to the darker granite countertops, backsplash and professional-grade stainless-steel appliances. New French doors at the back of the kitchen lead out to the back yard and outdoor seating areas.



The formerly unused back yard (inset) is now a pleasant oasis for the family (above). A two-tiered circular, stone and flagstone ledge leads to the kitchen through French doors. Sweeping curved retaining walls balance the feel of the large home on a relatively small lot (opposite). A set of curved, flagstone steps leads to a Spanish cedar pergola visible in the background.



Prior to the renovation, the yard was rarely used, but is now considered a favorite oasis by the family. It incorporates multiple seating and entertaining areas. A series of graduated, curved stone retaining walls and flagstone steps leads to a Spanish cedar pergola in a corner that overlooks the property. New landscaping tripled the useable space, which includes a flagstone patio that was extended from just outside the original breakfast area to cover more than half the backyard. Carderock was used again for the low curving retaining walls that define the perimeter. Stacked boulders, Spanish cypress fencing and small boxwoods in stone

planters add additional interest. Water features and new lighting enhance the outdoor area, and plant materials including Leyland cypress trees were selected to help maintain privacy from nearby homes.

This award-winning home now truly reflects the tastes and interests of its owners, and will provide a comfortable and elegant space to entertain family and friends for many years. ❖

*Tracy Mitchell Griggs is a freelance writer based in Philadelphia and Maryland's Eastern Shore. Photographer Bob Narod is based in Sterling, Virginia.*

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