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Pure GEOMETRY

Pushing the interplay of vertical and horizontal lines indoors and out, a design team transforms a 1970s contemporary into a light-filled tour de force

By Barbara Karth
Photography by Julia Heine



Architecture: Mark McInturff, FAIA, principal; Peter Noonan, project architect, McInturff Architects, Bethesda, Maryland
Contractor: Bowa Builders, Inc., McLean, Virginia
Interior Design: Richard F. Geary, Geary Design, Inc., Naples, Florida
Landscape Architecture: Gregg Bleam, Gregg Bleam Landscape Architects, Charlottesville, Virginia

The geometry of the house with its angular planes and tall, white vertical tower is juxtaposed against a long horizontal wall of stacked slate in a black and white composition (left). Architect Mark McInturff opened up the long living room with broad expanses of windows overlooking the five-acre property (pictured here). The suspended console table on the wall of sandblasted glass is actually an extension of the mahogany dining table top projected through the wall.









Interior designer Richard Geary let the architecture dictate the seating arrangement in the living room. He designed the custom rug and cocktail table. The red B&B Italia chairs make a bold statement.



In the dining room, McInturff sheathed the ceiling in sandblasted glass punctuating it with light (above). A rolling screen of sandblasted glass opens from the dining room to reveal the kitchen (opposite).

On rare occasions the proverbial stars and planets align for a celestial collaboration: Washington-area architect Mark McInturff; Charlottesville, Virginia, landscape architect Gregg Blead; and Naples, Florida, interior designer Richard Geary talked, sketched, faxed and e-mailed ideas and concepts to redesign a 1970s-era home and all it encompassed. This "important house incorporating the efforts of a strong group of people," notes McInturff, "is one where we were able to integrate interiors, architecture and landscape."

For McInturff, much of architecture is about light. From the beginning of this project he focused on opening up the house, blending the interior and the exterior. Although linking indoors and outdoors has been the hallowed call among designers for the past decade or so, McInturff took the practice to new heights, actually running a glass ceiling through an exterior wall. But that comes later.

The original approach to the house was an ordinary circular driveway—so Blead and McInturff set out creating a

sense of anticipation. "There was no mystery about arriving at the house," recalls Blead. An opportunity to revise the approach came about as McInturff added a garage and a guesthouse to the five-acre property. Now arriving by car takes visitors through an *allée* of London plane trees and crushed stone; the geometry of the house with its angular planes and tall, white vertical tower is juxtaposed against a long horizontal wall of stacked slate in a black and white composition. The nearby garage and guest suite enclose an arrival court as drama replaces the ho-hum.

The original house, a shotgun plan with one room leading to the next, presented the opportunity to open spaces to the out-of-doors. The living room had been a large, two-story affair with broad expanses of wall punctuated by an overlook from the floor above. Window walls were cut up, fragmenting the vast landscape and compromising the view.

Before beginning the project, the client had shared a collection of favored pictures of homes. "They tended to be sophis-



ticated, mostly European kinds of interiors, no-nonsense in a way, but at the same time pretty sensuous," notes McInturff.

The architect opened up the long living room, creating detail and presence. No-nonsense came with the control of line and form: Broad expanses of steel windows with the thinnest of mullions score through the view like the lines of an abstract painter. Sensuality came through materials—warm maple floors and a limestone fireplace relieving the expanse of drywall. Along with the window height, they give the room human dimension. A stainless-steel mantel slices through the wall of stone.

McInturff's attention to view and light are not only evident in the window walls, but in the cut-outs between rooms: the eye never stops. Openings—narrow and vertical, broad and explicit—establish detail and presence. Spaces are separated according to function, yet are not visually isolated. Once a mere overlook, a balcony with mahogany and stainless-steel railings is now suspended over the living room

as more horizontal and vertical lines create a purposeful and restrained decorative element.

In addition to light, this house is about materials and line used with innovation in each and every succeeding room. For example, upper kitchen cabinets and the wall housing a bar that separates the living room from the library are wrapped in a rich mahogany.

Designing the interior space fell to Geary, a self-described "architect wannabe" whose ambitions were stymied, not by the geometry, but the abstract math and calculus the degree requires. He is an architect's interior designer. "I don't really do my own thing," he professes. "For me, architecture and interiors have to be one.

"I wanted to reinforce the axes, most of which Mark had created, because that was really the theme of the house. Those axes create the blocks the furniture sits in," Geary explains. He chose the Meritalia sofa for the extra seating along its broad back, a nod to the client's penchant for large



McInturff expanded the kitchen vertically, sacrificing an upstairs bedroom to vary ceiling heights from space to space (opposite). Here again, maple, mahogany and black granite are reiterated in a consistent material palette (above).

parties—and a functional example of “less being more.” Minimal pieces provide an abundance of seating while, at another time, two or four can gather around the fire for more intimate conversation.

Geary designed the cocktail table, incorporating McInturff’s choice of materials—maple, mahogany and stainless steel. It is a modification of one of Geary’s own furniture designs. “I treat the furniture as architecture,” he explains. “The rugs became the artwork. The red chairs are treated as objects.” Viewed from the entry, they give instantaneous pop, a welcoming invitation into an impressive home.

Incredibly, the console table on the wall of sandblasted glass is an extension of the mahogany dining table top projected through the glass wall. “There is a lot of engineering and a lot of fabrication in that,” says McInturff. This furniture-cum-architecture is another collaborative triumph between Geary and McInturff. Geary selected the leather and flat

bar stainless-steel Mies van der Rohe-designed Brno chairs (circa 1930) for seating at the table.

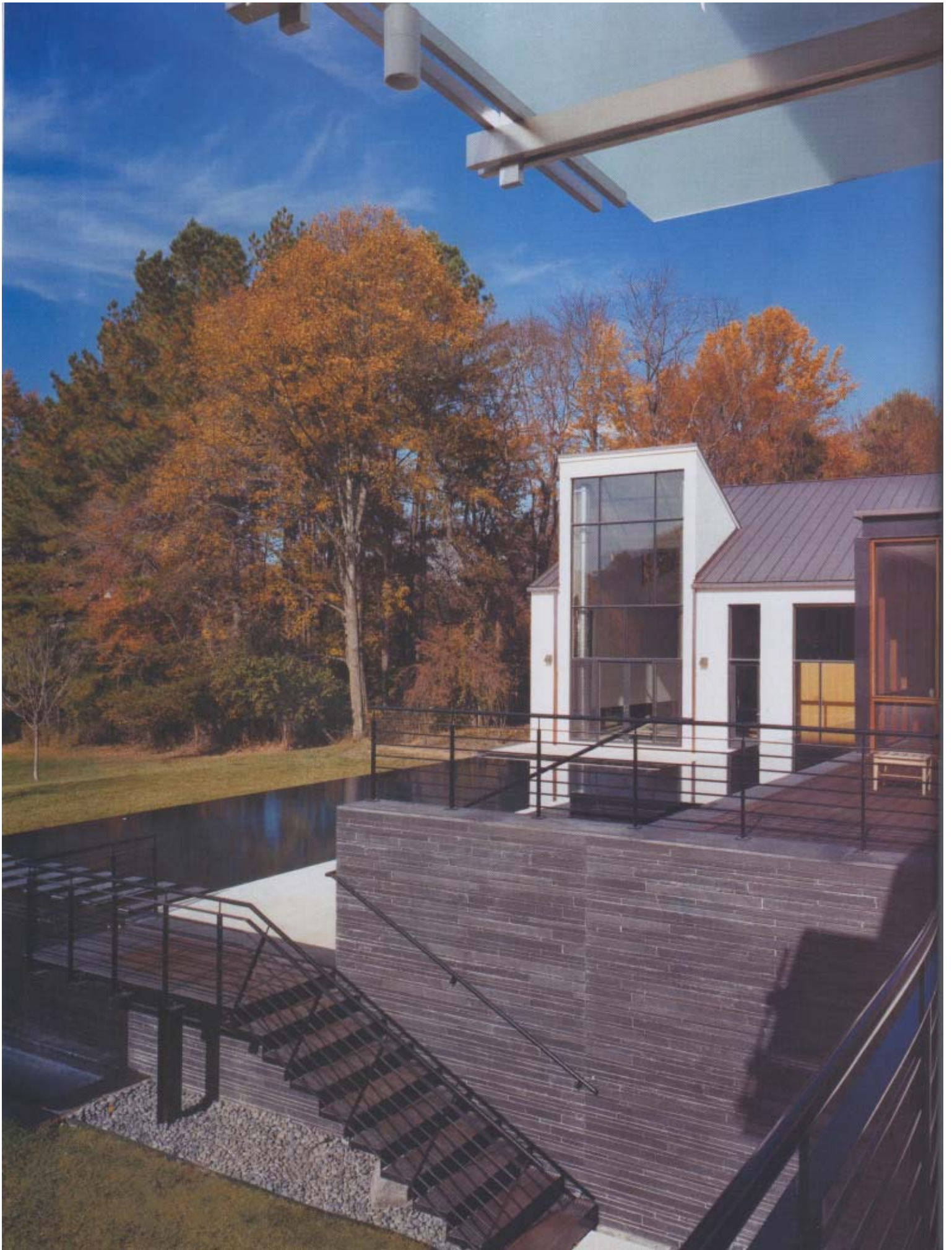
McInturff carried his choice of materials, line and form from the living room into the dining room with the limestone wall and fireplace. Openings in the wall lead the eye into the living room and the view beyond.

The architect sheathed the ceiling in sandblasted glass, punctuating it with light. He then added track lighting built into a beam, “which drops these little guys as well as a couple of spotlights that light the far wall,” he says. “The ceiling becomes the light fixture.”

Then, in a bold move, McInturff bridged the barriers between inside and out, forcing the frosted glass ceiling through the exterior wall and creating a dramatic, translucent roof for the balcony.

Maximizing the shotgun arrangement of rooms to open them up to the outside, he employed translucent, sandblast-







McInturff bridged the barriers between inside and out, forcing a frosted glass ceiling through the exterior wall and creating a dramatic, translucent roof for the balcony (above). He collaborated with Bleam for a unified design incorporating an indoor pool, an outdoor pool and a reflecting pool. The horizontal line formed by a wing housing the indoor pool is interrupted by a reversal in the angle of the roofline as mullions in the tall window create a Mondrian-like grid (opposite).

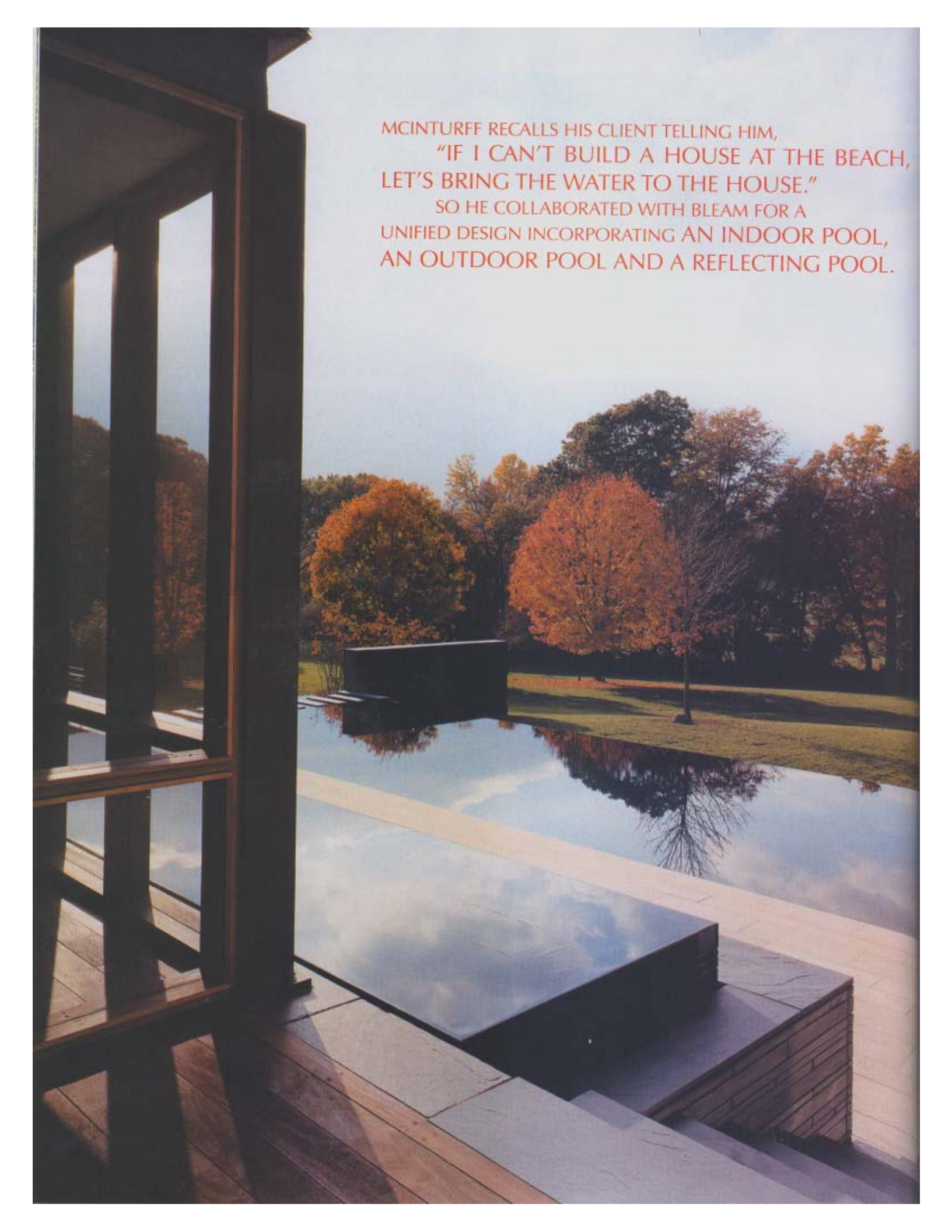
ed glass as room dividers, harvesting light from adjacent spaces. A rolling screen of sandblasted glass weighing hundreds of pounds separates the dining room from the kitchen. When opened, it creates a view from the kitchen sink all the way through the dining room, then the living room to the lawn and trees in the distance. Closed, it screens off the kitchen and caterers during a large party

McInturff also harnessed the latest in technology. "In general," he explains, "our approach to lighting is to over-light and over-switch. This house has a 'scene system,' which allows you to hit a button and to set that room to an evening scene and another button will switch it to a daytime scene or whatever." It offers an infinite variety of combinations,

allowing a homeowner to balance light in the day and create multiple moods in the evening.

McInturff expanded the kitchen vertically, sacrificing an upstairs bedroom to vary ceiling heights from space to space. Here again, maple, mahogany and black granite are reiterated in a consistent theme of materials, the black granite echoing the fabrication of the outdoor reflecting pool.

For counter stools, Geary found himself hard-pressed to find a modern design that swiveled, one with both arms and a back. So, he laughs, he committed an "architectural no-no, bastardizing" Le Corbusier's Turning Chair (1929) by adding inches to the chrome-plated steel feet with a foot ring to hide the joints.



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"IF I CAN'T BUILD A HOUSE AT THE BEACH,
LET'S BRING THE WATER TO THE HOUSE."

SO HE COLLABORATED WITH BLEAM FOR A
UNIFIED DESIGN INCORPORATING AN INDOOR POOL,
AN OUTDOOR POOL AND A REFLECTING POOL.



The indoor pool with spa (above) was placed on the same axis as the adjacent, re-built reflecting pool and outdoor pool (opposite). Pavers nearby appear to float in the water.

From the beginning, it was the site that drew the owner to this property, so the inclusion of balconies, terraces, porches and pools became an integral component of the design. Through form and line, black and white, the exterior of the home evolved into an interplay of vertical and horizontal elements. On the main level of the house, where the balcony wraps around the living room and dining room, a framed support system for the glass ceiling interrupts the flat plane of the exterior as function and architectural interest converge.

McInturff recalls his client telling him, "If I can't build a house at the beach, let's bring the water to the house." So he collaborated with Blead for a unified design incorporating an indoor pool, an outdoor pool and a reflecting pool.

The horizontal line formed by a wing housing the indoor pool is interrupted by an abrupt reversal in the angle of the

roofline as mullions in the tall window create a Mondrian-like grid. Creative minds met as the indoor pool was placed on the same axis as the adjacent, re-built outdoor pool.

"We were dealing with a five-foot grade change between the back door of the house and the swimming pool. How do we make that transition?" questions Blead. In addition, he notes, "We were very interested in trying to make a water connection very clear from the house." The solution: Just outside the screened porch Blead designed a 50-foot-long, black granite reflecting pool with a zero-grade edge. Beyond, on the next level down, he positioned the swimming pool, also 50 feet long with a zero-grade edge. Both reflect the sky, the clouds and the trees. A slate wall anchors the pool, serving to help screen out the tennis court below

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from the indoor pool. Pavers nearby appear to float in the water. A stacked slate wall and a steel staircase at the end of the swimming pool lead down to a waterfall and smaller pool and the tennis court. Viewed from specific points, the pools blend into one reflective shimmer, melding seamlessly with the lawn and trees beyond.

McInturff, Blean and Geary developed a give-and-take relationship, running ideas and concepts back and forth until ownership became amorphous. Knowing effective collaboration is based on respect for related disciplines, they were also linked by a commitment to modernism.

When individuals, each knowledgeable in his own field, come together and complete their task, it's as though the stars and planets have aligned. The outcome is something to celebrate. ♦

Contributing editor Barbara Karth resides in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Julia Heine is a photographer at McInturff Architects in Bethesda, Maryland.

RESOURCES

LIVING ROOM

Chairs: B&B Italia. **Sofa:** Maritalia. **Cocktail Table & Rug:** Custom by Geary Design, Naples, FL.

DINING ROOM

Table: Custom design by Mark McInturff and Richard Geary. **Chairs:** Knoll.

KITCHEN

Bar Stools: Cassina. **Rug:** Custom by Geary Design, Naples, FL.

INDOOR POOL

Chairs & Ottomans: Summit.

PORCH

Table & Chairs: Brown Jordan.