

## Urban architecture just one of the joys of city life



**Dennis Hockman**

### Chesapeake Home

If money were no object, I'd have houses all over the country — in all different environments. A contemporary modular house in California's Napa Valley. An off-the-grid ranch powered by solar panels in the foothills of Montana's Bitterroot Range. A houseboat docked in Seattle.

But since money certainly is an object and one of those lottery tickets my wife keeps buying would have to win before my second-home dream becomes reality, I'll be sticking with my house in Baltimore.

An inveterate city dweller, I prefer to focus on the benefits of city life, the potential. Of course, the daily news is peppered with the negative aspects. Whether or not we agree on the merits of city living, we can't ignore that urbanites make up the vast majority of the U.S. population. Studies indicate that more than 82 percent of Americans live in urban environments.

Because our population is composed overwhelmingly of people living in cities and their number is projected to grow, ChesapeakeHome Magazine dedicates one issue a year to city living — to exploring often smaller, often more contemporary residences, as well as the lifestyles and decorating challenges associated with them.

But while economists, politicians, ecologists, architects, developers and others all acknowledge the crucial role cities will play as the population increases and natural resources decline, for me one of the real joys of city living comes from architecture.

When I think about the cities I love, I think about the buildings. New York's fabled brownstones. San Francisco's ornamented Victorians. Miami's Art Deco masterpieces.

Deco masterpieces.

Even a basic knowledge of architectural history lets you visit a new place and understand some of its history. The age and style of houses point to eras during which cities, regions or the nation thrived.

Baltimore saw its heyday sometime around the turn of the last century, and the Mount Vernon neighborhood has some of the most beautiful and well-preserved 19th-century architecture anywhere.

Neighborhoods like Mount Vernon offer people an opportunity to be part of history,

to reclaim the grandeur of a townhouse once owned by a prominent industrialist. Other neighborhoods present similar opportunities: evening strolls down streets where new immigrants once walked on their way to inventing what today we call the American Dream; a view of the Inner Harbor, near where our national anthem came to life.

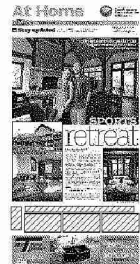
Like Baltimore, many cities were also once home to thriving industries. As American industrial centers dispersed to the suburbs, rural areas and overseas, left behind were really great buildings poised for renovation, empty lots where factories once stood — prime locations ready for the next contemporary loft.

In ChesapeakeHome's most recent focus on city living, we explore two projects that stylistically bear little in common. One is a new condo in the Inner Harbor, the other a renovated Arts and Crafts/Craftsman-style house on the Virginia side of the Potomac with a view of the Washington Monument.

Located in the Ritz-Carlton Residences, a condo designed by Rita St. Clair Associates' Brian Thim juxtaposes rock 'n' roll memorabilia and iconography with Asian vibes to create a space that is at once fun and energetic, effortless, serene and cool. Fundamental to the overall atmosphere, though, is the space outside this condo — a large terrace off the living room with panoramic views of Baltimore and the Inner Harbor. Keeping in tune with the cool, Zen-like tone set by Thim, Turner Landscape created a tranquil space incorporating the basic elements of a Japanese garden — stone, water and plants.

Like the Ritz condo, the second project captures a spectacular view. A Dutch Colonial house located in Clarendon, Va., offers an urban vista from its added "eagle's nest" third floor.

Conceived by custom builder and renovation specialist **BOWA** and its clients, Joe



and Jill Presta, as a nautically inspired octagonal tower designed for plotting out boat trips, the eagle's nest defines the renovation of this home. The Prestas, in love with the charm of their 1920s home, couldn't imagine moving, so instead they added on and renovated. Both the homeowners and builder took great care to match such new and old elements as windows, doors and molding profiles, imbuing the renovations and added spaces with the details and quality of an era gone by.

On the surface, these two projects share little more than great views and urban location. Of course, the conveniences of being close to work, restaurants and culture that often draw people to urban environments supply a common thread.

But it's the differences that weave such an interesting fabric. Because cities develop over the course of decades, if not centuries, urban architecture can range from the earliest Colonial structures and grand residences of the Industrial Era to the avant-garde contemporaries that punctuate today's up-and-coming neighborhoods. Stone, brick, wood, steel, concrete and glass stand as a testament to who we are right now, and also to who we've been.

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ANNE GUMMERSON/PHOTO FOR CHESAPEAKEHOME

View of downtown Baltimore from a private terrace at the Ritz-Carlton Residences.