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a light touch

A WELL-TRAVELED COUPLE REVIVES AN OLD HOME IN BETHESDA WITH A SPACIOUS, ECO-FRIENDLY DESIGN THAT EMBRACES FAMILY, ART AND ENTERTAINING.

WRITTEN BY **JENNIFER SERGENT** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ANGIE SECKINGER**

INTERIOR DESIGN Celia Welch, Celia Welch Interiors
ARCHITECTURE Stephen Muse, Muse Architects
HOME BUILDER George Fritz, Horizon Builders
BEDROOMS 5 | **BATHROOMS** 6 | **SQUARE FEET** 5,000

Architect Stephen Muse called it "corrective surgery," and the result holds true: A 1930s-era home for a couple and their two daughters looks much the same from the street as it did when it was built. But a thoroughly modern renovation and addition, with interiors guided by designer Celia Welch, give it the space, light and comfort necessary for the family's present-day needs.

After longtime stints in Asia and New York, the couple, who work in media, moved to Washington, D.C., for new postings, and rented for more than a year while they searched for a home in nearby Bethesda. "We really liked the neighborhood, but everything we saw was a center-staircase, low-ceiling Colonial," says the wife. This house was no different, but it struck a chord. "We just liked the look," she says—especially its quiet, wooded surroundings. So the couple brought in a team that would preserve that look while transforming it over 18 months with a major, eco-friendly renovation.

"They wanted to make sure they were stewards of the environment," says builder George Fritz, whose firm orchestrated the construction,

The home's exterior, left, looks virtually as it did when it was built in 1933. The expanded living room is grounded with a Tibetan rug, along with a Baker sofa, Visual Comfort floor lamps and a cocktail table by Salvations Architectural Furnishings.

A painting by artist Pu Jie dominates the family room. The owners commissioned the armchairs in China and bought the coffee table in Sweden. The Arteriors Home floor lamp complements the room's leaded windows.

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"but they also wanted to be comfortable." With spray-foam insulation behind every wall, geothermal heating and cooling, and new windows throughout, the project satisfied the clients' green goals, at the same time making it comfortable year-round. "There's so much stuff in this house that's eco-friendly," Welch adds, noting a flat section of roof that can accommodate a garden, low- and no-VOC paint and reclaimed white-oak floors infused with water-based stains.

A brick wall—originally the home's exterior—is painted in Farrow & Ball's White Tie to amplify the light streaming in from skylights above. The entry foyer, much wider now since the original staircase was removed, serves as an art gallery and overflow space for the owners' large receptions. The tufted bench is from Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams.

Another design priority was reorienting the views. Muse moved a small side porch to the front so a new window-filled family room could look out to the expansive parkland beyond the property line. Next, he created taller ceilings, bigger public areas, gallery walls for the homeowners' large collection of contemporary Asian art—and a showstopping staircase.

To fill those dramatic spaces, Welch started by taking inventory. "We went through to see what things had to stay, and which ones had an emotional connection," Welch says. Then, it was a matter of placement. A cherished pair of Chinese horseshoe chairs graces the living room;

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in the library, a wrecking ball bearing the word "freedom"—made entirely of newspapers—holds pride of place, a gift from Chinese artist Tao Xue. The dining room is home to a newly commissioned live-edge dining table and sideboard from Uhuru, a design studio in the Brooklyn neighborhood where the family used to live. The owners already had six Chinese scholar chairs they wanted to use for the table, and Welch found more at a local antiques shop to fill it out.

To get the color scheme right, Welch pinned paint chips to rooms on the architectural plans so colors would flow seamlessly through the house. That's because Muse designed it so nearly every room is visible at the same time, particularly on the first floor. "You have to make sure the circulation through the house works properly," Muse says, especially because his clients entertain frequently.

The pièce de résistance is the "chimney of light," as the owners describe it, which houses the staircase that runs up through the home's center.

An antique Chinese mirror crowns the dining room, illuminated by Baker lights. The custom table and sideboard are by Uhuru Design, and the New England Collection rug has stood up to kids, the family dog and frequent dinner parties.

Designer Celia Welch used the owners' antique Tibetan rugs to add color to the neutral master bedroom. A curved William Yeoward settee echoes the lines of the sleigh bed, flanked by lamps from Urban Country.

The owners wanted their master bathroom to be "a quiet, soothing space," Welch says. She responded with dark slate floors and Carrara marble from Architectural Ceramics. Architect Stephen Muse created multiple light sources with windows and skylights, and designed a special glide system for the shutters over the tub to ensure privacy.

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Light streams down from overhead skylights, illuminating custom stairs and a sinuous banister that was carved to mimic the lines of the antique horseshoe chairs in the living room.

The overall effect of the new design, Welch says, coupled with the meditative spirit of the owners' Asian art and furnishings, gives the home energy and spirit. "I'm always amazed when I go back. There's still this wonderful, peaceful feeling in there," she adds. "The family just looks really comfortable, really at ease in their new space."