

THE GRAVEL PARKING COURT is embraced by the front entry and a three-bay garage, which is cleverly tucked into the hillside. The exterior materials are a simple suite of shingles, zinc-coated copper, and glass. The central hallway (FACING PAGE), which serves as an art gallery, is lined with makore, an African hardwood.



MODERN



ANOMALY

ARCHITECT ADOLFO PEREZ AND INTERIOR DESIGNER DENNIS DUFFY
GIVE A NEIGHBORHOOD OF TRADITIONAL HOUSES A CONTEMPORARY GEM



I

N THE BOSTON SUBURB OF WESTON, MASSACHUSETTS, ROADS meander through wooded hills punctuated by manicured estates with clapboarded Colonial- and brick Georgian-style houses. They're all handsome homes that whisper "comfortably conservative." And one of them once belonged to the couple who commissioned Newton, Massachusetts, architect Adolfo Perez to design them something quite different.

Empty nesters, the husband and wife split their project duties neatly. She cared about style and function, he cared about location. When a 1-acre lot with a 1950s neo-Georgian house came on the market in their neighborhood, they saw the opportunity they'd been waiting for. It was a case of right place, wrong house. But with a few changes, she would have a chance to get the modern house she'd always wanted, and he wouldn't have to leave his preferred neck of the Weston woods. Her instructions to Perez were specific enough to set a course, but open-ended enough to



THE DINING TABLE (FACING PAGE), designed by architect Adolfo Perez, divides the large open main room, which has views of deep woods. Above the table is a bronze chandelier with an alabaster-and-mica shade. In the living room (FACING PAGE, BOTTOM), the fireplace is framed by a wall of makore wood and "Rainforest Green" marble, materials that complement the kitchen's eucalyptus cabinets and Verde Fuoco granite countertops.







allow him to be creative: Conceive a new and contemporary structure, use natural materials, and please include one big room. And she let slip that she liked Frank Lloyd Wright, “but without the stained glass.”

The first challenge was the lot itself. Narrow already, it was further attenuated by wetland along one edge and a ledge along another. Working with those limitations, Perez was able to play against the neighborhood norm of grand center entrance to design a building that presents its narrow side to the street. Nonetheless, there’s no mistaking the entrance; up the straight gravel driveway and across a parking courtyard, a bold grid of oversize windows sits above the front door, clearly indicating “enter here.” To the right, a connected three-bay garage firmly defines the space.

The home’s exterior is a suite of three materials: cedar, glass, and zinc-coated copper. The walls are shingled, with all projections — roof cornices, porch roof and columns, gutters and downspouts — sheathed in metal, a

A LOT OF WORK went into this quiet corner of repose (FACING PAGE) in the master bedroom. Interior designer Dennis Duffy specified the motorized room-darkening shades from Back Bay Shutters. A metal side table adds industrial edge to the Tibetan wool-and-silk area rug from Steven King Carpets. The owner’s art studio (ABOVE) looks out over the woods and features a leather-bound carpet and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s leather-and-chrome Barcelona chair.

simple logic that gives the building solidity and calm. The house’s shape is also simple, with two wings flanking an indented central section, with a porch that overlooks the wooded wetland. The tangle of nature gives way to a more structured landscape by Wesley Wirth of Thomas Wirth Associates in Sherborn, Massachusetts, with bluestone walks, native plantings, and a broad expanse of grass in the backyard, perfect for garden parties or visiting grandchildren.

Through the double-glass front door is an exquisite foyer sheathed in shiplapped planks of makore, an African hardwood. Its warm glow and exacting joinery set a tone of quality for the house. The room’s double height reveals a vaulted central hall ringed by a second-story walkway that gives the space its geometry. The long gallery that leads deeper into the house is also clad in makore and features two matched bookcases, precisely incised into the wall and flanked by artwork from the owners’ collection. In soft counterpoint to the architecture’s strong horizontals and verticals, light fixtures with voluptuous curves hang overhead. In the foyer, there is a sphere of wavy glass designed by Charles Loomis, and the gallery is lit by a series of curtainlike pendants by Artemide. The former was suggested by Perez, the latter by Boston interior designer Dennis Duffy of Duffy Design Group, only the first of many examples of how the two worked in harmony on the project. Duffy is modest when he says that he



AT NIGHT, THE WARM WOOD inside the house takes on a rich glow. The many large windows look onto a protected bluestone patio, which, in turn, looks out to a woody glen. On the second floor, a private deck is accessible from the master suite and an upstairs walkway.



DESIGN DECISIONS

Exotic Makore

The striking use of makore wood addressed several design issues. Architect Adolfo Perez's clients like red, which led to the reddish-brown stain on the exterior shingles. To link the outside to the inside, and to make entering the house a memorable experience, Perez lined the most important public spaces — foyer, gallery hall, and both staircases — with wood instead of plaster. Rather than using cherry or redwood, he tracked down the more exotic African makore, whose warm red tones are accentuated and evened out by a toned polyurethane finish. Before the wood was milled into 6-inch-by-8-foot planks by Rhode Island cabinetmakers Herrick & White, Perez visited J. Gibson McIlvain Company, the Connecticut supplier that stocked it, to check for consistency and quality. The strong horizontals of the shiplapping guide the eye deeper into the house for a welcoming effect.

simply followed the direction set by Perez's design; in fact, the furnishings and fabrics interact with the interior spaces with nuance and assurance.

Off the gallery, on the center axis of the house's symmetrical floor plan, is the big room the wife requested. A tour de force of architecture and decoration, the space encompasses a striking L-shaped kitchen with custom eucalyptus cabinetry and Verde Fuoco granite countertops, a central dining table with a stainless steel base (designed by Perez) illuminated by an alabaster-and-mica chandelier by Pagani Studio, and a living room with a 1970s-inspired lacquer coffee table (designed by Duffy) and a fireplace wall of rain-forest-green granite. The whole is washed with natural light from twin skylights.

The kitchen's configuration was one of the few areas where client and architect disagreed. Perez wanted to pierce the L with a doorway for easy access from the garage and foyer; the wife wanted a more sequestered place in which to cook. She "won," with Perez cheerfully acknowledging that he erred on the side of convenience. "I realized I was pushing for something that would have saved maybe 10 extra paces," he says. "It's much better this way."

A media room, office, and laundry occupy the rear wing, while two matching staircases lead to the second floor from either end of the gallery. Upstairs, the master suite overlooks the backyard on one side and opens to a large outdoor deck on the other. The bedroom is notable for its modest size. "Less bedroom, more closet," says Perez.

The second-floor rooms — master suite, two guest suites, the husband's office, and the wife's art studio — are connected by the striking walkway that overlooks the gallery and a bank of clerestory windows. The openness of the design yields constantly changing vistas of and through the building, and one always has a strong and comforting sense of where in the house one is.

Well built, well sited, not too big, and impeccably styled, this new house has moved into its traditional neighborhood with just the right attitude. Think of it as "comfortably non-conformist." ■

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