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Welcome

or if you are a subscriber, welcome back—to ARCHITECTUREDC, the free quarterly magazine on architecture in the Washington metro area. This is our third annual Architecture@Home issue focusing entirely on residential design.

This issue will let you peer around the corner and over the walls of some of Washington’s great private spaces. A penthouse, a “green” house, and some remarkably un-private bathrooms are stops on our tour. Our feature article takes you inside one of Washington’s best-kept secrets, a modern treasure in Cleveland Park designed by one very famous architect. See it for yourself on June 14th during a tour to benefit the Washington Architectural Foundation (details page 10).

Other features will show you how to make the most of your own space. If you’re ready for improvements, let the staff of the Washington Chapter of the American Institute of Architects help you get started. Call 202.667.1798 to visit our Resource Center. Or check out our website, www.aiadc.com, which includes a complete list of our member firms, as well as a continuation of some features in this issue—more on the construction of that Cleveland Park residence and an evolving list of products that will help you go green.

We hope this sneak peek inside some special Washington homes will inspire you to create your own perfect space.

Mary Fitch, AICP, Executive Director AIA/DC

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Thank you to the writers contributing to this issue of ARCHITECTUREDC.

Ronald O’Rourke grew up in an Eichler-built townhouse in San Francisco. His father, Jack O’Rourke, an architect for 41 years, designed contemporary homes and other structures in the San Francisco Bay area and exposed Ronald to architecture at an early age. Ronald and his wife, Mary Fitch, live in a recently renovated, award-winning, modern townhouse in Adams Morgan that was designed by Robert M. Gurney, FAIA.

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Thank you to Carrie Sweeney, AIA/DC Membership Manager, for preparing the excerpt by William Sloyton on page 12.
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Dan Snyder found his dream house at the Georgetown flea market. One Sunday, he picked up a copy of 25 Years of Record Houses, a compendium put out in 1981 by Architectural Record magazine. The public relations executive was surprised to see a few Washington addresses among the award-winning designs. "There were two or three houses by Hugh Jacobsen—I knew his work—and then this house by I. M. Pei."

I.M. Pei & Associates won a Record House award in 1964 for a small house in Cleveland Park. Then, as now, the firm was known primarily for their large-scale projects; they had recently completed the Southwest Washington Urban Renewal Plan (1961) and would soon bring Washington the Third Church of Christ, Scientist and Christian Science Monitor Building (1971), and East Wing of the National Gallery of Art (1978), among other modernist landmarks.

This tiny residential project was an exception. Designed for the family of Pei's colleague and friend William Slayton, the Urban Renewal Administration Commissioner, the house was set off Ordway Street, NW, behind a tall brick wall. Peeking over the wall, the distinctive shape of three poured concrete vaults would suggest something uniquely modern—but that suggestion would remain largely a secret until now, unpublished other than its early debut in Architectural Record and uncelebrated by the town it called home.

Snyder was captivated by the pictures and plans of the house in his flea-market book. He asked some friends who lived in Cleveland Park if they knew it; in fact, they lived around the corner. They walked by and Snyder peered over the wall, seeing for himself how floor-to-ceiling windows open to a living space that spans the front of the house. He circled around to the alley and
discovered that on its sloped site, the house becomes two stories of glass in the back.

Snyder called his realtor friend Charlie Gaynor of City Houses. “When I move, this is the house I want,” Snyder said. He hadn’t seen the inside, but he felt he knew it from the plans he had studied. It wasn’t on the market, but they drew up a contract anyway, leaving the price blank. Ready to jump at the first sign of availability, Snyder waited in his house in Kalorama—for three more years.

Snyder was not the first person to be infatuated with the house. Its original owner William Slayton and his wife Mary Louise, a.k.a. “Bug,” the project was a labor of love from its inception. Despite their modest budget, William Slayton was determined to bring this unusual house to Washington. Recalls Kellogg Wong, FAIA, then the project architect at I. M. Pei & Associates, “Nothing could dissuade him. It was a masterpiece of a home for him.”

William Slayton documented every step of the design process in intimate detail (see “Vignettes,” page 12). Like family heirlooms, every check paid to Pei & Associates was saved. When the Slaytons died during the summer of 1999, after living in the house for 40 years, their ashes were entombed in a sundial in the front yard.

Architects, planners, developers, and others of the Slaytons’ circle—the “Slayton Irregulars,” as they called themselves—gathered in the living room to pay tribute. I. M. Pei delivered a eulogy from the top of the stairs. According to attendees, Pei noticed the conspicuous water stains on the brick walls, caused by years of roof leaking. “I’m an architect, not an engineer,” Pei explained to the crowd.

Snyder’s realtor knew another realtor, Connie Maffin of Coldwell Banker/Pardoe, who knew the Slayton family. Maffin let the Slayton’s daughters know that a very interested buyer was waiting in the wings. After some negotiation, but without seeing inside the house, Snyder signed a contract with the daughters. “I had just peeked in the windows,” Snyder admits.

The bold move made sense to Snyder. “I like to renovate houses. I thought it would be great to put all that energy into a house that is worthy of all the attention—because it’s a lot of energy that goes into a renovation.”

Pei would probably understand Snyder’s reasoning. “He expends as much energy on a small project as on a large,” reports Wong, asked why Pei doesn’t design more residential projects. Pei is rumored to have designed two or three houses in his long career, but his firm discourages their promotion, and the architect will not discuss them. Wong’s explanation is, “Anyone who does houses knows that you need to work very closely with the client, and it requires a tremendous amount of your time.”

An architect’s investment in a house pays off bit by bit, year after year, in the pleasures it provides its owner. That was the other reason why Snyder wanted this house. “You learn something about a house every day,” he explains. “You can walk through a building, spend an hour there or even a
Snyder has lived in the house for the past three years, overseeing its substantial renovation. Architectural masterpiece or not, any house gets messy during a renovation, and Snyder has had his share of plaster dust and take-out dinners, as well as some less common disruptions, such as having his floors jack-hammered to mud (so radiant floor heating could be installed where the original under-floor air ducts had collapsed).

Leading the renovation is architect Hugh Newell Jacobsen, FAIA. Jacobsen was a friend of the Slaytons, and he has known the house from its infancy in 1960. "When I heard Pei's house was being constructed, I dropped by and watched it come out of the ground," he recalls.

A celebrated modernist in his own right, Jacobsen takes a light hand to his colleague's work. "All houses have to change somewhat. But when you remodel anyone's work, you must never erase the original architect." It may surprise those only familiar with Jacobsen's distinctive houses that the architect also designed the West Terraces and Offices of the U.S. Capitol (1988) and the Renwick Gallery Renovation (1972). "It would have been terrible chutzpah if I had overshadowed Renwick," Jacobsen says.

"Do the right thing," has become the mandate of this project, guided by the question of what the Slaytons would have done if they had had more resources. William Slayton's detailed memoirs help provide answers. He describes how Pei wanted to use marble for the living room floor, but they couldn't afford it. Pei suggested teak, but Mrs. Slayton wanted carpet. "Bug pointed out that the walls were brick and the ceiling concrete. She felt a soft rather than a hard surface for the floor would be preferable," Slayton recalls.

Mrs. Slayton won out, but when it came time for Snyder to replace the wall-to-wall carpet upstairs and vinyl asbestos tile on the lower level, he and Jacobsen chose white travertine marble. One of Jacobsen's favorite materials, the travertine is unfilled, so each piece is a study of natural cavities.

The most dramatic change in the house is not one the Slaytons would have made with more money, but one they might have made with one less daughter. By removing the wall of a bedroom at the top of the stairs, the north-south axis of the central vault is opened to the house at large.

The space is now an airy and light-filled library, lined by Jacobsen's signature egg-crate bookcases, which actually form the walls between the library and the remaining two bedrooms on either side. Previously, the library had been part of the living room, set off by a free-standing, shoulder-high bookcase. After much debate, Snyder decided to remove that bookcase, but he saved it in the basement in case a later owner wants to reinstall it.

Modern conveniences have been added to the house on the lower level. A travertine-lined guest bathroom with elegant Philippe Stark fixtures is designed to accommodate Snyder's brother, who uses a wheelchair. In the kitchen, Snyder enjoys a new Thermador stove and Subzero refrigerator and wine cooler. The original birch cabinet doors were saved and refinished; white Formica countertops were replaced with white DuPont Corian. Snyder applauds the
original architect for cabinets that are 30 inches deep rather than 24. The extra depth allows for the cook's comfortable clearance of cabinets hanging above.

Jacobsen and Snyder replaced cabinets separating the kitchen from a breakfast nook with a cantilevered DuPont Corian breakfast bar. The kitchen remains small by today's standards—about 180 square feet—but Snyder reports it easily accommodates entertaining. "You can fit three cooks in here comfortably," he claims.

The house looks finished, comfortably outfitted with Snyder's Gene Davis art and '50s-era Dunbar furniture. But Snyder is quick to note what's undone, from the master bathroom that hasn't been remodeled to the computer cord that should be hidden.

Every few weeks Snyder climbs on the roof to make sure the gutters, which run between the barrel vaults and drain into brick piers at the center of the house, are clear of leaves and debris. Snyder has also replaced the roof, resealed the skylight, and dug trenches around the foundation. Along with his regular trips to the roof, he seems to be keeping the water out. If Pei were to visit now, no apologies would be necessary.

Still ahead is the landscaping around the house. Original project architect Wong remembers, "Bill did not have the money, but someone with more resources would have asked the architect to integrate landscape design." Taking his cues from the house, Jay Graham, ASLA, of Graham Landscape Architecture is designing front and back yards that will extend the lines of the interior to the exterior.

A pool will stretch into the courtyard, continuing the north-south axis of the opened center bedroom. Also planned are a back terrace with a tree house-like screened porch, a fountain by the front door, and the strategic use of bamboo to screen the oasis.

Despite all the changes, the Slaytons' ashes will stay in the courtyard, testament to the bond between a house and its inhabitants.

---

Tour This House

June 14, 2003

Dan Snyder will generously open his home to the public as a benefit for the Washington Architectural Foundation on Saturday, June 14th, 2003. Tours of 3411 Ordway Street, NW, will commence every half-hour from 2 to 4 p.m., concluding with a special tour at 5 p.m. that includes a reception (attended by owner Snyder, architect Hugh Newell Jacobsen, FAIA, friends of the Slayton family, and other fans of the house).

Cost is $20 for the afternoon tours, $50 for the 5 p.m. tour/reception. Prepaid registration required. Go online to www.aiadc.com. For more information, call 202.667.1798.

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On Teoh Ming's and my next flight together, I asked him if he would design us a house. I also told him of what I figured we could afford. He said he would be honored to design us a house, but that I had to understand that the house would have one major feature that would be expensive. My response was that I expected his design to be different and special and would expect it to have an outstanding feature that would be more expensive than normal construction.

One day Bug called me in great excitement. Just by chance she had seen a lot in Cleveland Park with a "For Sale" on it. She wanted me to take a look at it right away. So I went. The 50' x 135' lot was disappointing. It was flanked on both sides by distinguished, 15 foot houses and fronted by an undistinguished, 15 foot house on the west, and even less distinguished duplex on the east, and a sagging wood gable which needed paint and repairs across the street. The rear of the lot sloped 45 degrees to the alley. I told Bug it was a lot we should forget it. She said we should have Teoh Ming look at it. I acquiesced.

The next time Teoh Ming was in town, out we went to the "dog." Teoh Ming looked at the lot and its surroundings and turned to us and said, "Where do you want to live?" Our answer was that we preferred Cleveland Park because of the presence of friends, and its being close-in. Teoh Ming then turned to us and said quite simply, "I can build you kind of a house here. This is the lot you should buy." We bought the lot for $6,900.

Shortly after our programming discussions, Teoh Ming and I attended a banquet in New York. The banquet turned out to be dull; we had heard the speech several times. So Teoh Ming and I turned our attention to the house design.

Pei picked up one of the menus and on the back sketched a Palladian house—a design in the shape of a cruciform. He entered the dimensions and the room designations—all in a very small scale. The drawing took up less than half of an 8-and-a-half by 11 piece of paper. Teoh Ming asked me to take the sketch to Tom Wright and ask him to draw it up at a 1/4" scale.

Upon returning to Washington, I took it to Tom [Wright, FAIA] and asked him to do what Teoh Ming had requested. Much later Tom told me that he had been insulted to be asked to draw up a plan from such a vague sketch but had discovered when he started drawing it that the dimensions were quite accurate and that the whole design was really carefully thought out.
The design took on specificity—materials, dimensions, surfaces, etc. It was here that Teoh Ming and I liked the surfaces to be plain and simple. White was my favorite color. Bug, on the other hand, wanted warm and colorful surfaces.

There was the issue of the living room floor. Teoh Ming asked Bug what she wanted. She said carpet. He didn't like carpet. He suggested marble. I said we couldn't afford it. He suggested teak with oriental rugs. I said we couldn't afford it. Bug pointed out that the walls were brick and the ceiling concrete. She felt a soft rather than a hard surface for the floor would be preferable.

We compromised. We put in carpet but used travertine for the entrance way and fireplace hearth.

Generally, I agreed with Teoh Ming rather than with Bug, so it was no surprise when some time during this process Bug turned to me and said, "I hope you and Teoh Ming will be very happy in your house!"

The Revelation

We had to wait some time for the concrete to set and cure, so all that forest-like framework had to stay up for some time. However, one evening when Bug and I were on our way to a dinner party, I suggested to Bug that we stop by the house, since I thought the support framework had been dismantled.

It was just toward dusk—the "purple light" time of the day, as a friend calls it. I got out of the car, walked across the debris-strewn front garden, and entered the living room. The framework was removed, the honeycomb ceiling was exposed, but the space was there! It was then that I experienced for the first time the emotion of the three dimensional space. It was a strong, personal, highly emotional reaction. I can still remember that incredible feeling of that space.

The architect has that advantage. He [she] can envisage the space without being in it. I had to be in it. But it was that moment that made me realize that I had been right: the house was all I hoped it would be; it was, through Teoh Ming, something that I had created and for which I had an intense emotional attachment.

I have never had that intensity of feeling about the space since, but I have never ceased enjoying it. As Keats said:

A thing of beauty is a joy forever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never Pass onto nothingness.
**3415 36th Street, NW**  
Waldron Faulkner, FAIA, 1937

My father designed this house shortly after we moved to Washington. He was 36 years old and had just completed the site plan and original buildings of the Madeira School. The style was "art moderne," not "art deco" as an architectural critic once said. My teenage friends called it "The Egyptian Embassy." The structure of the house is steel, originally intended to support cast concrete panels. Costs were prohibitive so the design was carried out in painted brick with blue and yellow ceramic tile decorative frets. My family lived in the house until the 1980s. In 1940, my father designed the guest house next door. I would later design two houses on Ordway Street, three more on 36th Street, and a south wing to the guest house in the 1990s.

—Winthrop Faulkner, FAIA

**2800 University Terrace, NW**  
Vosbeck-Ward & Associates Architects, 1960  
Fabry Associates Architects, Addition, 1987

I first noticed this very different home when I attended Key Elementary School. Perched on the hillside across the street was a striking modern house with exposed steel columns and beams, walls of glass, and a flat roof. For a short while I delivered the newspaper to its curious rear entrance every morning, and I glimpsed the fascinating interior once a month when collecting money.

Today the house remains a daily acquaintance as I walk my son to the same school. A new student recently arrived in his class, happy to be back from overseas with his parents, the new owners of my favorite home. They tell me it was designed for a professor from California in the style of the famous Case Study Houses. I plan to visit often.

—Mark Binsted, AIA  
Mark Binsted Architect

**The Brown House**  
Audubon Terrace, NW  
Richard Neutra, 1968  
Cass & Associates Architects, 1992

My romance with Richard Neutra's Brown House began by candlelight. We had been invited to a going-away party for some mutual friends, and a summer thunderstorm had knocked out the electricity. As we groped our way down the blackened dead-end street toward the house, the glass walls of the living room, surrounded by the shimmering "water rail" of the deck, shone like a beacon in the mist. It was a magical evening and, needless to say, love at first sight.

Asymmetrically sited on a double lot, the house turns its back to the other houses on the street and welcomes the surrounding park through walls of glass. It is a study in simplicity. Years later, when we were asked to add a piano room to the front of the house in a place that Neutra had reserved for future expansion, we were reminded of just how difficult simplicity is to achieve.

As in the best love stories, neither the intimacy of that exercise nor the passage of time has diminished my affection for this wonderful house.

—Heather Cass, FAIA

**River Park Homes**  
4th Street SW between N and O Streets  
Charles M. Goodman, 1963-1965

Developed by Reynolds Aluminum Corporation to promote aluminum in housing construction, Charles M. Goodman's River Park Homes in southwest Washington are lively, unapologetic, modern interpretations of the row house type. Using his client's product to resolve the claustrophobic tendency of urban row houses, Goodman clad the ends of each unit with aluminum-frame glass walls. The design lets light pour in and gives uninterrupted views out to a private garden. In some ways, these light-filled, open dwellings embody an optimism almost lost in Washington architecture: modern architecture and the city can coexist and thrive if given the chance.

—Eric Jenkins, AIA
Modern penthouse apartments of the kind found in New York are a rarity in Washington—but that may soon change, thanks to an inspiring new rooftop condominium designed by DC-based Bonstra Architects. The two-story apartment, perched atop a recently renovated, 1940s-era apartment building at 1212 M Street, NW, injects a strong note of modernism into the rapidly redeveloping area north of Massachusetts Avenue and east of 16th Street.

For David Tolson, the developer who renovated the existing four-story building, the plan to add a rooftop condo posed a question common to the design of any addition project: should the addition be designed to blend in with the architecture of the existing building or to stand more in contrast to it? Although the first path can appear simpler to execute, in practice it can lead to a design that mimics the existing building's architecture in a clumsy or watered-down manner.

Responding to the growing interest in modern design among Washington homebuyers, Tolson chose the second route. He selected Bonstra Architects to develop a design for the unit that would act as a modern counterpoint to the traditional architecture of the original building and to the mostly unremarkable post-World War II apartment buildings around it. The assignment was a welcome addition to Bonstra Architects' growing portfolio of modern residential projects in this part of Washington, which includes the Tapies condominium building at 1616 16th Street, NW, and the SoLo Piazza condominium building at 13th and N Streets, NW.

"The original philosophy of this project is the glass box," says project architect Julian Piperov. "The concept is the Unprivate House," he explains further, referring to an influential exhibition on modern residential architecture held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1999. "You see and you want to be seen—that's the concept. It's like [being] on a stage."

The exterior of the penthouse, which is viewable at street-level from various angles, is a classic modernist composition that combines large expanses of glass with overlapping and interlocking planes of stucco and metal, topped by a soaring butterfly roof. When viewed from the south (alley) side, the unit bears some resemblance, on a much smaller scale, to two other recent modern buildings across town—the World Bank building on the 1800 block of H Street, NW, and the new Italian Chancery just off Massachusetts Avenue, NW, in the upper embassy row area.
The penthouse's large expanses of glass are mostly on its south side. During the day, the windows fill the unit with light and warmth. At night, they turn the apartment into a softly glowing neighborhood lantern. The north side of the unit, facing M Street, is dominated by overlapping planes of stucco, which are painted in cream ochre tones that complement the warm colors of the brick buildings in the area.

Slicing down through the southwest and northeast corners of the unit are vertical fin walls clad in copper panels that have been pre-oxidized to achieve a green patina. Bill Bonstra, AIA, the principal in charge of the project, says the fin walls act like straps that anchor the unit to the building.

The penthouse's interior is dominated by a spectacular double-height living/dining room, clad largely in glass, that reaches 19 feet up to the sky. A sliding glass door leads to an outdoor deck, and a two-sided fireplace set into the glass wall serves both spaces.

The presence of taller apartment buildings to the north, east, and south restricts the penthouse's lines of sight in those directions. If the unit had been designed in a traditional style, several of its windows might have pointed directly at these buildings, magnifying this limitation. Bonstra and Piperov's modern design approach permits a more creative solution: the penthouse's windows are oriented toward the corners of the unit to take advantage of unobstructed views in those directions.

One of these views is to the northwest, toward the spire of Luther Place Memorial Church at 1226 Vermont Avenue, NW (on the north end of Thomas Circle), which was built in 1874. Another is to the southeast, toward the Ascension and Saint Agnes Episcopal Church at 1212 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, which was built in 1875. Both structures are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The view toward Ascension and Saint Agnes became a key organizing device for the penthouse's interior layout. The kitchen and the stainless steel stair leading to the second floor (the latter designed and fabricated by local sculptor Robert Cole) are aligned with this view, and the front edge of the second floor is rotated in this direction, splitting the apartment's rectangular footprint along a diagonal that becomes the dividing line for the two halves of the butterfly roof overhead. (The penthouse's green copper fin walls provide an additional exterior visual link to the green copper roof of the church.)

The penthouse's second-floor bridge, which crosses over the living/dining room, leads to a small, glass-enclosed sitting area in the southeast corner. With its large windows and close-up view of Ascension and Saint Agnes, this sitting area is an intimate and privileged space that, along with the living/dining room, helps fulfill the architects' original glass-box concept for the project.

The rest of the second floor is organized into two bedrooms and a full bath. To create an unchallenged zone of privacy—a concession to conventional Washington lifestyles—these bedrooms are closed off from the rest of the unit. Bonstra and Piperov point out, however, that a buyer could easily open the bedrooms to the living/dining room below, in the more open and transparent style of a modern New York loft. The two bedrooms could also be reconfigured into a single large master suite.

For decades, modern design has existed mostly at the edges of Washington residential architecture. Now, however, it is increasingly in demand by local homebuyers. Both long-time Washington residents and people moving into the city for the first time are seeking modern living spaces in the form of detached houses, townhouses, and lofts. Mid-scale apartment buildings like 1212 M Street, which are below Washington's height limit, provide an opportunity to add modern penthouse apartments to the selection. Such projects, rather than adding yet another historicist note to Washington's architectural landscape, can enliven the city's architectural mix and help move it into the future.

Bonstra's new penthouse unit is not only an exciting living space, but an inspiration for Washington developers and homebuyers.

What Is a Fin Wall?

A fin wall is a wall that projects from the edge of a building, somewhat like a fish fin, the fin on the taillight of a '57 Chevy, or the vertical marquee of an old-style movie theater. Fin walls often cross or pierce through other exterior walls, particularly glass walls. They can be incorporated into a building's design to help articulate a facade (i.e., divide it into smaller segments), to visually highlight or punctuate a part of a building, or to create a sense of dynamic movement or openness. Fin walls are often included in modernist designs.
Growing up in the Pacific Northwest, my suburban neighborhood had a "green" house. An angular wood structure with large expanses of glass and roof solar panels, it looked to me more like a UFO than a house. Today, green architecture has evolved to where its appearance can be indistinguishable from "traditional" design strategies. Beecher House, home of Rick Schneider, AIA, a principal in the Washington architecture firm Inscape Studio, is an example of a house that is environmentally friendly without compromising aesthetics.

The first and most important green, or sustainable, decision Schneider made was to purchase an existing home in an established neighborhood with proximity to public transportation. By choosing to renovate rather than build from the ground up, Schneider conserved the materials and energy required for new construction. His Glover Park home is within walking distance of shopping and restaurants. He lives close to his office and often rides the bus or bicycles to work.

Schneider's corner property is naturally sustainable. East-wall windows enable most rooms in the house to have natural light from two sides. The west-facing side of the home, which is the most susceptible to unwanted solar glare and heat gain, is shared with the adjacent row house. The south façade, also vulnerable to negative summer solar effects, is shaded in the summer by a canopy overhang. On the north, Schneider renovated his porch to create an outdoor living room used in three seasons.

The landscaping is also environmentally friendly. Schneider planted his yard with indigenous species of plants that require less watering. This decreases the strain on local water sources during peak periods while providing a payback to the homeowner in utility savings. On his small shed roof, Schneider uses roof plants to increase water
absorption and decrease the amount of water discharged into the local storm water system.

When I entered Schneider’s home, the first thing I noticed is what I didn’t see—overtly sustainable design features. Most floors are natural hardwood with wool area rugs. A modernized galley kitchen, with spare wood cabinetry and stainless steel appliances, borrows light from the adjacent sunroom. The décor is tasteful but not avant-garde. It could be the interior of almost any home on its street. Yet somehow the house feels different. Why?

First, there is an abundance of natural light. Diffused daylight softly illuminates the north-facing living room. A south-facing sunroom at the rear, visible from the living room and foyer, radiates direct sunlight, glowing and beckoning, spilling over into the kitchen. Inhale and the air seems more natural, more pure, because there is no trace of chemicals. Schneider explains that the living room, along with the rest of the interior, is primed and painted with materials low in volatile organic compounds (VOC). VOCs are harmful chemicals commonly found in paints and coatings, adhesives, and carpets. Selecting materials that have low VOC content improves indoor air quality and helps preserve the earth’s atmosphere.

On this warm spring day, the house is quiet because Schneider relies heavily on natural cooling methods. Operable windows on opposing walls maximize cross-ventilation, while ceiling fans provide localized cooling. This is typical of Schneider’s approach, which favors small-scale adjustments over heating and cooling the entire home. To avoid unnecessary conditioning of rooms that are not being occupied, Schneider chose to provide central A/C to the upstairs only, thereby reducing the consumption of harmful ozone-depleting refrigerants used by traditional air conditioners. On very hot summer days, he uses a supply air vent over the stairs to cool the lower floor by convection. Some may consider the lack of whole-house central air to be a compromise, but Schneider sees it as an opportunity: “We enjoy more time outdoors and are more attuned to the changing of the seasons. We are better conditioned to the local climate, which has expanded our natural comfort zone.” In addition, Schneider saves on his utility bill.

In the kitchen, Schneider chose IKEA cabinets based partly on cost, but also because the company is known for being environmentally friendly. IKEA uses a more compact shipping procedure that reduces packaging waste. He recycled his old kitchen cabinets by using them for basement
energy conservation in mind. He chose a highly efficient dishwasher and specified bathroom showerheads with low water-flow volume to reduce water consumption. This helps to minimize the strain on local water supply and treatment facilities, which reduces utility charges while adding little cost to the project. Sustainable circles refer to this as "rapid payback"; the homeowner quickly recovers the initial premium paid for a green strategy through life-cycle savings.

Building green does present some additional challenges. Despite increasing consumer demand for green products, affordability and availability still vary. In addition, contractors may be unfamiliar or unaccustomed to sustainable practice. Schneider encourages homeowners to be proactive about sustainability. To get started, he suggests that people explore the Internet, where there is an abundance of green-related material. "For larger, more complex projects, an architect can help the homeowner to integrate various green strategies and do more with less."

Schneider endorses a team approach, where the architect facilitates a dialogue between owner and contractor to ensure that the homeowner's sustainable goals are being met. The boundaries of sustainability are ever expanding. Once considered an "alternative" lifestyle, today sustainable is becoming the norm. In this wide-angle

Rick Schneider's 10 Green Home-Improvement Tips

Products are available at any hardware store.

1. Wrap your hot water heater with an insulating blanket (pipes too, if you can).
2. Use low or no-VOC paints and sealers. All major manufacturers make at least one.
3. Install Energy-Star rated appliances and equipment.
4. Change incandescent bulbs to compact fluorescents (CFLs).
5. Use non-toxic cleaning solutions like borax, vinegar, and baking soda.
6. Avoid vinyl in all forms, including siding and furniture.
7. Use composite decking, cedar, or non-toxic treated lumber instead of pressure-treated lumber on decks and porches.
8. Use cement board or cedar instead of vinyl for siding.
9. Replace old windows with non-vinyl insulated windows.
10. Use natural daylight and ventilation whenever possible.

And recycle and compost your "waste."
Green Products for Home Renovations

by William Craig, LEED AP

Looking to improve the environmental performance of your house? Here are a few "green" products you might want to know about. More are listed on www.aiadc.com.

**Energy-Efficient Equipment & Appliances**

[www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov)

Homeowners are always updating equipment and appliances, whether or not it's part of a larger project in which an architect might have a role. The Department of Energy's Energy Star program is a good source of information to aid in selecting the most energy- and water-efficient models currently available.

**Cork Flooring**

[www.regupol.com](http://www.regupol.com)  
[www.wicanders.com](http://www.wicanders.com)

This is an all-time favorite for "green" architects as well as "organic" architects like Frank Lloyd Wright! It is a 100% natural, rapidly-renewable bark that forms a truly resilient flooring material. It makes a real difference for people who stand a lot and are prone to back fatigue. I think it looks fantastic, particularly when finished with wax.

**Agriboard and Medium Density Fiberboard (MDF)**

[www.isobord.com](http://www.isobord.com)  
[www.phenixbiocomposites.com](http://www.phenixbiocomposites.com)  
[www.homasote.com](http://www.homasote.com)  
[www.sierrapine.com](http://www.sierrapine.com)

For home improvement projects, there could be any number of uses for such products, from wall surfacing to cabinets, from miscellaneous carpentry to trim.

**Strawboard** and **wheatboard** are composed of leftover agricultural residue that would otherwise get burned. They can yield magnificent finished surfaces. Plus, they have a subtle, warm, cereal smell.

**Medite** is a urea-formaldehyde-free MDF with high recycled content that can be used indoors for many things. I love the look of it for cabinets with just a clear coat of water-borne lacquer. I've been told that woodworkers actually prefer the workability of Medite to traditional MDF, a rather toxic material.

**Homasote** makes many readily available panel products (tackboards, etc.) from 100% recycled newspapers and a wax-type binder.

**Programmable Thermostats**

[www.invensysibs.com](http://www.invensysibs.com)  

These allow for more precise control of thermal comfort systems. A microprocessor is programmed with automatic settings based on occupancy and/or exterior conditions. For control of wasteful lighting, occupancy and daylight sensors can also be useful.

**GFX Drainwater Heat Recovery Systems**

[www.endlessshower.com/welcome](http://www.endlessshower.com/welcome)

When you take a shower, a lot of hot water goes down the drain. This simple unit, made of high-heat-transfer copper, simply wraps the cold water supply line around the shower drain, so you're combining hot and warm water at the mixing valve rather than actually combining hot and cold water. As a result, you turn down the shower temperature and save energy. (Of course, the other way to look at it is that you can take a longer shower.) These have no moving parts and are maintenance-free. There are a number of sizes, and they can work either at individual showers or for the whole house.

**Non-Asphalt Paving**

[www.stabilizersolutions.com](http://www.stabilizersolutions.com)  
[www.invisiblestructures.com](http://www.invisiblestructures.com)

The byproduct of rampant development and suburban sprawl is the paving-over of nearly everything. Anything homeowners can do to allow water into the ground is a step in the right direction. When it comes time to re-do your driveway, consider porous or semi-porous alternatives to asphalt that are also cooler and more pleasant to be around.

The first weblink above is for a product that is a binder of psyllium fiber husk (super-Metamucil, would you believe?) that is mixed with fine aggregate and laid in a thick bed. It is semi-porous and appropriate for light vehicular traffic. The National Park Service (for whom my office often works) uses it frequently. The second link is for a product that is a system of open plastic rings arranged in a grid with a backing of geotextile fabric. Once laid, the rings are filled with gravel. The result is a very porous system, which may require only a bit of raking periodically.

So those are a few examples of the relatively easy stuff. For the committed environmentalist homeowner who wants to go a little further, there are solar photovoltaics, vegetated roofs, ground-coupled heat pumps (geothermal), micro-wind turbines, rainwater collection systems, and composting and urine-diverting toilets—just to name a few options.
Bathrooms

EXPOSED!

by Hannah McCann

Peek into these 10 new DC-area bathrooms and you'll see that we have come out of the water closet of the last century. These bathrooms are washed in daylight, richly appointed with natural materials, and, sometimes, unabashedly on view to the outside. Big and small, expensive and not, these projects show homeowners' obvious pleasure in what was once the plainest of private spaces.

This master bathroom shares in the landscape of its wooded site in Northern Virginia. Raw stone from the property forms the wall and floor of the shower. In addition to his-and-hers, hand-held shower heads and an overhead rainfall, a concealed spout lets a waterfall cascade over the rocks. Bathers look out at the woods through clear glass panes at eye level but are concealed at body level by glass laminated with pulp paper and leaves.

At the center of the bathroom is a private room for the toilet and bidet. Painted blue-green to resemble the fog of San Francisco, the serene space has no electric light. Two frosted-glass panels and a round skylight filter illumination from the outside.

Jon Hensley Architects
with Walter Gagliano, Interior Designer
"I wanted to work with daylight," says architect Tom Shiner, AIA, of this bathroom designed for the Tenleytown home of his photographer friend Robert Lautman. Above a new cast-iron tub, the entire outside wall is replaced with tempered insulated glass, sandblasted for privacy. "When I visited the house after the bathroom was finished, I saw the effect of the daylight before I saw the bathroom," the architect recalls. "Light came flooding into the hall from the open door. The bathroom is blindingly awash with clean, white, diffused daylight."

Tom Shiner, AIA

Art glass became the inspiration for these collectors' master bath renovation in Cabin John. Green-gold glass mosaic tiles sparkle like water. A bubble-pattern glass block wall filters natural light over the chaise lounge. Glass bowl sinks, made to look like cracked ice, perch on an emerald granite counter. Limestone on the floor seems to reflect in the ceiling above, which is papered to look like pewter leaf. Only clear glass walls separate the shower and toilet from the rest of this elegant retreat.

Faby Associates Architects
with Walter Gagliano, Interior Design

Natural materials prove luxurious in this master bath designed by architect Bruce Wentworth, AIA, for his own home in northwest DC. The counter is honed Jerusalem limestone, stretching generously from the toilet to the glass shower, where it forms a bench. The floor is made of tumbled marble tiles. "Tumbled" refers to the rustic, rounded edges that give a soft look and a rich texture. The architect enjoys the benefits of living with his design. Wentworth reports, "The tumbled marble feels very good to the bare feet," and, in the limestone counters, "The fossils are cool."

Wentworth-Levine Architect-Builder, Inc.
"Water to water"

is the idea behind this Bethesda master bathroom. Boundaries are erased between the pool and the bath, the inside and out. The tub is recessed in a floor-to-ceiling glass bay to create the sense of bathing outdoors. Flagstone surrounding the pool continues inside as the bathroom floor. Behind a transparent wall, the shower's glass mosaic tiles glitter from daylight filtering through glass block. A ceiling-mounted showerhead makes showers feel like rain.

Cunningham + Quill Architects
Illuminating the Nude

Todd Ray, AIA, of Studio27 Architecture, on Optimal Lighting

Bathroom lighting is one of the most important interior lighting conditions in a home. It creates the aura for our morning rituals and the task of daily preparations. Carefully consider light direction, light color, and light intensity.

- The face should be illuminated evenly and without hard shadows. We frequently employ reflected light as well as direct illumination. A simple notion for lighting design is that light reflects from a surface. Try bouncing the light from the mirror back toward the subject, avoiding glare by veiling or concealing the light source. Use overhead lighting, or, even better, install fixtures on either side of a mirror to cross-illuminate. The centerline of two pendants or wall sconces should hang between 54" and 66" from the floor and 36" to 40" apart.

- Light color, also known as color rendition, is extremely important. Color quality is measured relative to the color spectrum of natural sunlight as the ideal. Color is primarily a function of the bulb, although the fixture may shift color. Halogen lighting is the best choice because it provides pure white illumination, whereas incandescent lighting creates a slight red, yellow, or warm shift. Fluorescent lighting typically has a slight blue or green color shift.

- Light intensity is often overlooked within a bathroom, and preferences vary. A basic measure is to have at least two 75 watt lamps to create a light level between 30 to 50 foot-candles at the mirror. A more ethereal notion is to design a soft illumination to create a play of shadows throughout the room and across the elegant figure of the body. Or you could simply install dimmers!

Todd Ray, AIA, of Studio27 Architecture

High style at low cost

is possible with a little thinking in the box—"box" stores like Ikea that offer affordable home decor. In this project, the Logan Circle client wanted a high-end table sink for her bathroom but couldn’t afford the price tag (upwards of $2,500). The architect suggested a compromise: take an Ikea kitchen cart ($199), cut a hole in the top, and under-mount a $55 sink. With a wall-mounted faucet, the elegant effect of a designer sink was achieved at 10 percent of the cost.

Meghan Walsh Studio
A cramped, Pepto Bismol-pink Bethesda bathroom is reinvented through several inexpensive moves. The tile is kept in place—saving the cost of removal and the addition to a landfill—and covered with corrugated steel siding. Instead of moving plumbing lines, the architect simply swapped the location of the shower and sink and rotated the toilet 90 degrees. In a new, open shower, a rainfall showerhead hangs in front of the window to give the impression of bathing outdoors. Floors are poured concrete with a red rock aggregate to resemble a muddy stream bed. The sink counter is also poured-in-place concrete, supported by a basic galvanized plumbing pipe.

Victoria Kiechel Architect AIA

Real redwood enhances the ceilings of two bathrooms in the Potomac home of architect Paul McGowan, AIA. Contractors balked at the unusual choice in material, so McGowan installed it himself. To seal the wood, McGowan used the same transparent stain he had used on his redwood deck. He ensured that the wood ceilings—and the rest of his new bathrooms—would survive high humidity by installing exhaust fans that are one size larger than the manufacturer’s recommendations.

John Paul McGowan, AIA
The stainless steel tub takes central stage in an open bay of windows of this Dupont Circle rowhouse. It and the stainless vanities were custom-designed by the architect to fit up the narrow 27" stair to the master suite. Industrial steel is juxtaposed with refined materials such as stone flooring (warmed by radiant floor heating) and plaster walls that have been hand-rubbed with an oriental trowel, creating an eggshell, powdery finish. To anyone coming up the stairs, a glass-enclosed shower is on full view.

David Jameson Architecture AIA
When Jean Gallagher hired FORMA, she wanted to take advantage of every inch of her small Capitol Hill loft apartment, let the spaces flow together, and update the look. Her kitchen was cramped, which made entertaining a challenge. We suggested that there was no reason for the kitchen and the living room to share such a large opening. Her huge refrigerator was at the expense of very limited counter space, and the laminate cabinets did not provide enough storage for a functional kitchen.

FORMA reduced the opening between the kitchen and living room to a sliver, enough for our client to keep visual contact with a guest in the living room while chopping onions, yet allowing for an extra row of cabinets above the sink. All appliances are updated to stainless steel, space-efficient models. The refrigerator has been replaced by an under-counter, side-by-side refrigerator and refrigerator/freezer that add up to the same capacity as the previous refrigerator. The uninterrupted concrete counter top is big enough to serve as a buffet layout space at a dinner party. The backsplash is glass with baked enamel color on the back. By custom-lacquering new fiberboard cabinets, we could match the color of the wall and create the illusion of a bigger kitchen. The fluorescent box light on the ceiling has been replaced with halogen downlights, and halogen spots under the cabinets provide work light. The ceramic tile floor has been replaced with the same hardwood floor used in the living areas.

The kitchen's concrete countertop extends into the living room as a breakfast ledge and continues on to become the fireplace ledge below our client's plasma TV. The colors, flooring, and lighting of the living room are also consistent with the kitchen space. As a result, the two spaces feel more connected now than they did with their big opening.

—Andreas Charalambous, AIA
FORMA Design
Q: Small Kitchen, Tight Budget?

A: Good Decisions & Sweat Equity.

Our kitchen began as a closet-size space with peeling linoleum, rusted-out appliances, and fluorescent lighting, but now it is a spacious and inviting gathering place. Cork flooring and rich wood cabinets add warmth. Three new large windows have replaced the wall-hung cabinets that seemed to encroach on the space; what we lost in storage we have more than gained in visual openness. Modern, blue-glass pendant lights and stainless steel appliances and accessories add sparkle and brightness. The high point of the kitchen (and perhaps the best construction story from the project—see sidebar) is the concrete countertop. We weren’t sure what to expect, but the end result is a rich, earthy texture and a surface that seems bigger than it is. Framed with cool dark steel, the countertop reflects other juxtapositions found throughout our house.

Sound expensive? It wasn’t. We found that if we spent our money wisely, the solutions were very economical. The pendant lights and the extra windows were our biggest buys, but these splurges really give the most punch. All of the base cabinets were on sale at Ikea and are surprisingly well built. You can save a lot of money if you assemble them yourself. Ours came in 117 boxes with those maddening directions of pictures and no words. But once you figure it out, it is really just a matter of repetition.

The countertops have the most bang for the buck. We used 7 bags of concrete at $2.50 a bag. The edging is just flat steel bar from Home Depot with stainless steel deck screws holding them in place (all cheap, easy-to-find items). We found the appliances that we wanted in one of the department stores but then bought them straight from the distributor, cutting out the middle-man. If you install them yourself, the cork floors are less than $4 per square foot.

—Griz Dwight, Assoc. AIA

I had planned on pouring the concrete countertops myself one night before my wife and I were leaving on vacation. I had calculated that I would need 4 bags of concrete, decided to buy 5, but once I saw that it was only $2.50 a bag, I bought 6. One thing led to another; it was midnight and I hadn’t started, but I had made the mental commitment to do it. I got started, and everything was going smoothly until I got halfway around and realized I had already used 4 bags. I was nervous that I would run out, but I still had the sink and some inset cutting boards to pour around, so I hoped I might be ok. Nope, I ran out 6” short.

I couldn’t let it set up while I was on vacation; it would have looked horrible. I decided to make a Home Depot run. I started to fill my bucket with water so the concrete wouldn’t harden. This is when my problems really started.

The shut-off valve broke off in my hand, spraying scalding water all over the kitchen. I panicked and tried to replace the broken valve while the bucket quickly filled. It was 3:30 a.m.; I was about to fill my kitchen with water; I didn’t know what to do; I started yelling for my wife. She had been in bed for hours and didn’t hear me. The bucket filled, so I grabbed the trash can and kept yelling. The can filled quickly and left me with a choice: I could abandon the kitchen, run to the basement, and try to shut off the water, or I could put my hand over the spraying hose with the scalding water and try to buy more time. I wasn’t going to leave so I covered the hose, burning a perfect “stigmata” circle in the palm of my hand.

The pain took my voice to the next level so that my wife finally heard me. She came running down and found me in the kitchen sitting on the floor, covered in wet garbage with tears in my eyes and my hand over a hose. She took one look at me and said, “I need pants for this.”

Well, we got it fixed (good thing Home Depot is open 24/7), and the counters look great. They have become one of the best parts of the house.

—Griz Dwight, Assoc. AIA
Q: One Room for Several Uses?  

A: Focus on Art, Smart Storage

This former bedroom is used as a home office, gallery space, TV room, and occasional guest room. The owners requested as much hidden storage as possible for binders and office supplies as well as lateral file drawers for archival storage. They needed desk space for the computer, printer, fax, and a small copier, plus clear space for manual writing.

The couple has collected Asian ceramics for years, but most of the pieces were hidden in the attic in their handmade boxes. We suggested a display wall as the focus of the room, designed for flexibility and optimal viewing of the art. Conceptually, the design is inspired by the overlapping structural connections in traditional Japanese and Chinese buildings. The horizontal supports and glass shelves can be repositioned for varied displays. Under the ceramics are storage cabinets with adjustable shelves.

Opposite the display wall is a large storage unit with pocketing doors that conceal a television, media equipment, and a guest closet with built-in drawers. Closed, the wall is a grid of bird’s eye maple with natural rice paper inserts, similar to opaque shoji panels. All the cabinet doors are similarly detailed.

The colors of the desk chair, custom sofa bed, pillows, reading chair, storage ottoman, and rug are deliberately muted to create a soft backdrop for ceramics and paintings. With the art as the focal point, all of the room’s other uses become good reasons for spending time in a soothing space.

—Kim Sammis, Project Designer 
Wnuk Spurlock Architecture

Q: Awkward Stairs?  

A: Bookshelf Railing

When a stairway is sandwiched between two walls, people often open one wall to allow for more connection between the two floors. However, this move can create a triangular pocket of space that breaks up the proportion of a room. Compounding the problem is the code requirement for railings. After adding a railing, the triangle is exaggerated and clashes even more with room’s spatial proportions. The triangle can be an eyesore and the first thing one sees upon entering the house.

To solve this problem and help solve another common household problem—lack of storage space—a bookshelf was designed to perform the task of a railing. The bookshelf/railing connects the stair and the room without clashing with proportional relationships. Since my clients are my cousins, and since they were on a very small budget that paid only for materials (paint-grade pine), I constructed it myself—with a little help from their neighbor and friend Peter McClintock, who happens to be a master carpenter for Peterson & Collins.

—Meghan Walsh, AIA
Meghan Walsh Studio
Q: Plain Façade? A: Arts and Crafts Facelift

My clients feel that their house is very bland and unattractive from the street. They also want a front porch so they can interact more with their neighbors. Since they like the Arts and Crafts style, we've decided that this is a good direction to go. Construction starts this summer.

We've come up with the idea of changing the awkward front projection into one of two front gables with steeply pitched roofs and a sloped shed roof between. An interesting overhang supported by brackets and decorative posts will add to the visual character. A bay window on one side will add depth and shadow; on the other, generous French doors will open from the dining room to the new front porch.

Brick and stone piers and planters will help tie it all together. The new roofs will be copper, and the decorative woodwork will be redwood; both materials will be repeated in the interior of the house, which is simultaneously undergoing a renovation. My clients are looking forward to having the outside of their home be as warm and welcoming as the inside.

—Reena Racki, AIA
Reena Racki Associates
Tongue-Tied in Home Design

Most People Have a Hard Time Expressing What They Like
by Katherine Solant
Inman News Features

When the subject is ice cream, nearly everyone can say what flavors they like
and why they prefer one flavor or brand to another—it’s more creamy, smooth, rich,
chunky, flavorful, chocolatey, crunchy, fruity, minty, tart or whatever.

Ditto with clothes. If those boot-cut jeans
don’t fit right, you can say precisely what the
problem is—they don’t flare enough at the cuff.
But when the subject is designing a house—a
subject that we would seem to know well because,
after all, we all live somewhere—most people are
tongue-tied.

Welcome to the wonderful world of custom
home design. People who seek out an architect to
design a house want something more than what
production builders offer. But most people have
a hard time conveying what the “extra something”
is that they’re looking for, several architects said in
recent interviews. Their clients don’t have trouble
discussing their functional requirements and
explaining why their current house is
unsatisfactory—that’s about 90 percent of what
the architect needs to know. But that last 10
percent—the subtleties and nuances that make a
space unique—is more elusive. The clients can
describe their preferences in broad terms—this
space makes me feel “comfortable” or “relaxed”—
but the architect needs more specifics before he
can design a room or a house.

Clients quickly discover that taking an idea
and turning it into a house is harder than it
looks, and this comes as a shock to many,
especially smart, successful business executives
who are used to making decisions, giving orders,
and controlling the pace from A to Z, said
Boston architect Jeremiah Eck. “One such
client admits that he can’t read drawings, and he
doesn’t know how to say ‘Maybe I just don’t like
it.’ He doesn’t even know how to say ‘Move the
doors and windows to the right or left’ and then
reflect on it.”

While the owners are having a hard time
expressing what they are looking for in a new
house, they’re still ready to jump into developing
a floor plan, and they don’t understand why their
architect is spending three of four weeks just
discussing the possibilities. The architects all
said, however, that if they began to design the
house right away, based on what their clients said
at the first meeting, the clients would get
something that they wouldn’t be happy with. All
that discussion and questioning is needed to get
an accurate accounting of the clients’ likes and
dislikes because they don’t always mean what
they say or say what they mean.

As he starts probing, trying to figure out his
clients’ tastes, the answers can be surprising. Eck
said, adding that years of experience have taught
him never to take the clients at their word when
expressing a stylistic preference. They say they
like a particular architectural style, but Eck often
finds that what the clients like is certain elements,
not the style as a whole and not the elements that
one might expect. For example, one client said he
really liked Tudor-styled houses, but what he
liked was not the exposed timbers inside and
out—the hallmark of this style—but the stucco,
the rough textured surface between the exposed
timbers on the exterior of the house.

Washington, DC, architect Norman Smith
said clients’ give clues to what they want, not only
by where they currently live, but also in their
body language. When he goes to a clients’ place
the first time, he said, “I watch to see how they
open the door. Do they stand aside and wave me
in? That implies they’re more relaxed and
informal and more likely to be open to the idea of
doing something unusual. Or, do they stand in
the door and block my way? That implies that

Much of the design process is making choices, says Norman Smith, AIA.

3 options for the same space by Norman Smith/Architecture

they’re more reserved and formal and more likely
to want a house that’s traditional. As the initial
discussion ensues, it’s like trying to follow a dance
partner that you’ve never danced with before and
trying to anticipate their body movements.
Architecture is both visual and visceral—it’s your
body in space.”

To help get things going, Smith usually
comes up with several options early on. “When
the clients begin to see the implications of what
they said they wanted, it’s often revealing. They
see a big kitchen in a drawn form and things
come out like ’How much time do you really
spend in the kitchen?’ ’Not as much time as we
think. Maybe we don’t want such a big kitchen,
especially if it takes money from other rooms we
know we will use.’”

As they discuss the tradeoffs between a bigger
kitchen and a bigger home office, the clients
begin to realize how much of the design process
is making choices, Smith said. This can be
unnerving initially because they’re not yet
confident in their ability to make good decisions
that, quite literally, they will have to live with.

Even more disconcerting, the most momentous
decisions that affect the overall concept are made
at the beginning when “most people can’t see that
decision A will chase through the project and hit
them at P and it won’t give them what they
want.”

Getting comfortable with the overall concept
can be a real challenge and may take several
weeks, but nearly everyone gets through it and
goes on to develop the rest of the design. In 350
jobs, Smith said only one person could never get
past the conceptual stage and abandoned the
project. He also added that the decision making
process gets easier as clients get more confident,
and the decisions are easier because they concern
details and finishes.

When the house is finished and the clients
have moved in, the architects said, more than one
has confessed that before he started he thought
any simpleton could design a house, but now he
knows better.

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The architect’s ideas are represented through models—miniature buildings in cardboard, wood, or clay—and drawings. Many models and drawings are generated throughout each phase of a building project. Drawings convey a lot of information about architectural style. By just looking at a drawing, you can usually tell the historical period of the building. The cross-shaped plan of a Gothic cathedral, for example, is clearly distinctive from the asymmetrical, pinwheel plan of a Frank Lloyd Wright house.

Most people associate architectural drawings with blueprints, paper copies that turn blue when the original drawing is fed through the blueprint machine (computers have replaced this early photographic process, which was invented in 1842). The architectural drawings that make up a set of blueprints follow standard formats to illustrate and document the three-dimensional spaces of a building in two dimensions. The drawings are drawn to scale—a proportional measurement determining the relationship of the drawing to the actual building. For example, a plan may be drawn with a 1/8-inch increment for every foot of real space.

How it all stacks up: Section drawings
Architectural designs may also be represented through section drawings. Section drawings are vertical slices through the building that show the height of rooms and staircases, and the thickness of the walls, roof, and interior façades. Section drawings for buildings with more than one story show the relationship of spaces stacked on different floors. Walls, columns, and other solid surfaces are usually indicated in heavy black or hatched lines called poché. See Figure 5-2.

Get a new plan, Stan
The most basic type of architectural drawing is a floor plan. You can see one in Figure 5-1. Floor plans are horizontal depictions of the building that show the arrangement of rooms, walls, windows, and doors on each level of the building. Drawing a floor plan is like cutting horizontally through the building and looking at this slice from above. Some architects start their building projects with a floor plan, which they consider the “generator” of the entire design. Typically, an architect draws a floor plan for each level of the building, as well as a site or plot plan that identifies the location and orientation of the building or buildings on a property.

Fun with spatial relationships:
Elevation drawings
Drawings of walls undistorted by perspective are called elevation drawings. You can see one of these in Figure 5-3. They show the arrangement of doors, windows, and other elements within the vertical plane of an exterior or interior wall. Elevation drawings are particularly useful for determining relationships between wall surfaces and windows rather than expressing the visual experience of the building.
The third dimension: Perspective drawings

A drawing that conveys the three-dimensional qualities of a building—the way you actually might see it—is called a perspective drawing. Perspective drawings, which were invented during the Renaissance, are constructed to resemble our field of vision and create a sense of depth and distance. See Figure 5-4. Today, architects often create perspective drawings on a computer with three-dimensional modeling programs.

Perspective and models are often used to help the client understand the building design because they capture the experience of occupying a space better than plans, section drawings, elevation drawings, and projection drawings.

Some other types of three-dimensional drawings are orthographic, axonometric, and isometric projections. They represent a building or an object in space through the projection of lines that are perpendicular or inclined to the picture plane. These drawings make the building or object look foreshortened (see Figure 5-5). The difference between an axonometric projection and an isometric projection can be seen in the angles used to create their foreshortening effects.

Figure 5-4: Perspective drawing

Figure 5-5: An orthographic projection.

Book Review

Deborah K. Dietsch's Architecture for Dummies
by Donald Beekman Myer, FAIA

This excellent synopsis of prehistoric, historic, and present-day western and eastern architecture is a remarkable feat of scholarship and courage. Deborah Dietsch suggests the top “Ten Architectural Masterpieces” as well as the “Ten Most Fascinating Architects Working Today.” You can pull the book off the shelf and quickly find anything from an abacus to a ziggurat, likewise Parthenon to Plater-Zyberk. This is where “A Reference for the Rest of Us” comes in. Deborah Dietsch, who is trained in architecture and preservation, was the editor of Architecture magazine and now writes for The Washington Post and major magazines. Her compact book can well serve architect or client, student or professor—indeed anyone who wants to go out and enjoy looking at or designing buildings. It is also fun to pick up and ramble through from time to time.

Dietrich provides drive-through exposure of subjects such as the death of downtown, reactions against sprawl, and new urbanism without sermonizing about SUVs or the evils of gated McMansion communities. She refreshingly discusses historic preservation, wondering “just how far should it go?” and alluding to the professional challenge of balancing pure restoration against change or even demolition.

The subjects are presented objectively. The lay connoisseur of architecture will also appreciate a presentation on essential elements and lingo, though “archibleable” is fortunately missing. Building parts are defined and shown to evolve through time: roofs, walls, windows, and doors have shapes, characteristics, materials, and, of course, style. The architectural spectator is further advised on more abstract features: solids and voids, scale and proportion, and mass. Because no building is unto itself, Architecture for Dummies also discusses urban design in terms of where we have been and where we are going. Did you know that there were early rectangular grid-planned towns in 2150 B.C. India? How about the fact that Richard Meier was influenced by Hadrian’s Villa when designing the Getty Center in Los Angeles? Proper names and architectural terms are put in perspective for an interested reader. Dietsch has provided a superb reference—no matter how humbling the title.

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