

A reflecting pool extends past the corner window of the living room. Landscape architect Gregg Bleam designed the pool as part of a garden planted with horsetail, grass and hornbeam trees.

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BALANCING ACT

A new Garrett Park home by architect Richard Williams marries crisp, modern lines with traditional materials

By DEBORAH K. DIETSCH



Eight years ago, a fire almost destroyed an 1891 wood-frame house in Garrett Park, Maryland, where such Victorian-era architecture is revered. Town preservationists hoped the burned dwelling could be saved to maintain the historic character of the community. The property's new owners agreed to consider restoration, but after hiring an engineer, discovered much of the structure was damaged beyond repair.

So these empty nesters replaced the charred wreck with what they call a "modern farmhouse." Says the husband, a retired information technology specialist, "We wanted something that fit into the neighborhood, a design that looks somewhat traditional on the outside, but is more contemporary inside."

Architect Richard Williams designed a spacious front porch, pitched roofs and wood siding to recall the architecture of nearby homes. Avoiding a sense of nostalgia, he rendered the familiar elements with crisp outlines and graphic contrasts between materials.

Fir-trimmed windows of different sizes stand out against the pale-stained cedar walls. The chimney rising above the roof at the front of the house turns out to be a light well illuminating the stair hall. "We simplified the architecture to its essential elements to create a restrained backdrop for our clients' lives," says Williams. "The design came from a balancing act between modern and traditional elements throughout the process."

ARCHITECTURE: RICHARD WILLIAMS, FAIA, principal in charge; Tim Abrams, AIA, LEED AP, project architect; CATHERINE FOWLKES, interiors, Richard Williams Architects, Washington, DC. LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE: GREGG BLEAM, FASLA, Gregg Bleam Landscape Architect, Charlottesville, Virginia. BUILDER: HORIZON BUILDERS, Crofton, Maryland.

Pitched roofs, cedar siding and a front porch (below and opposite) blend into the Garrett Park neighborhood of Victorian and traditional homes, while clean lines complement the minimalist pool and garden (above). Graphic contrasts between light-stained cedar siding and fir windows heighten the modern vibe.



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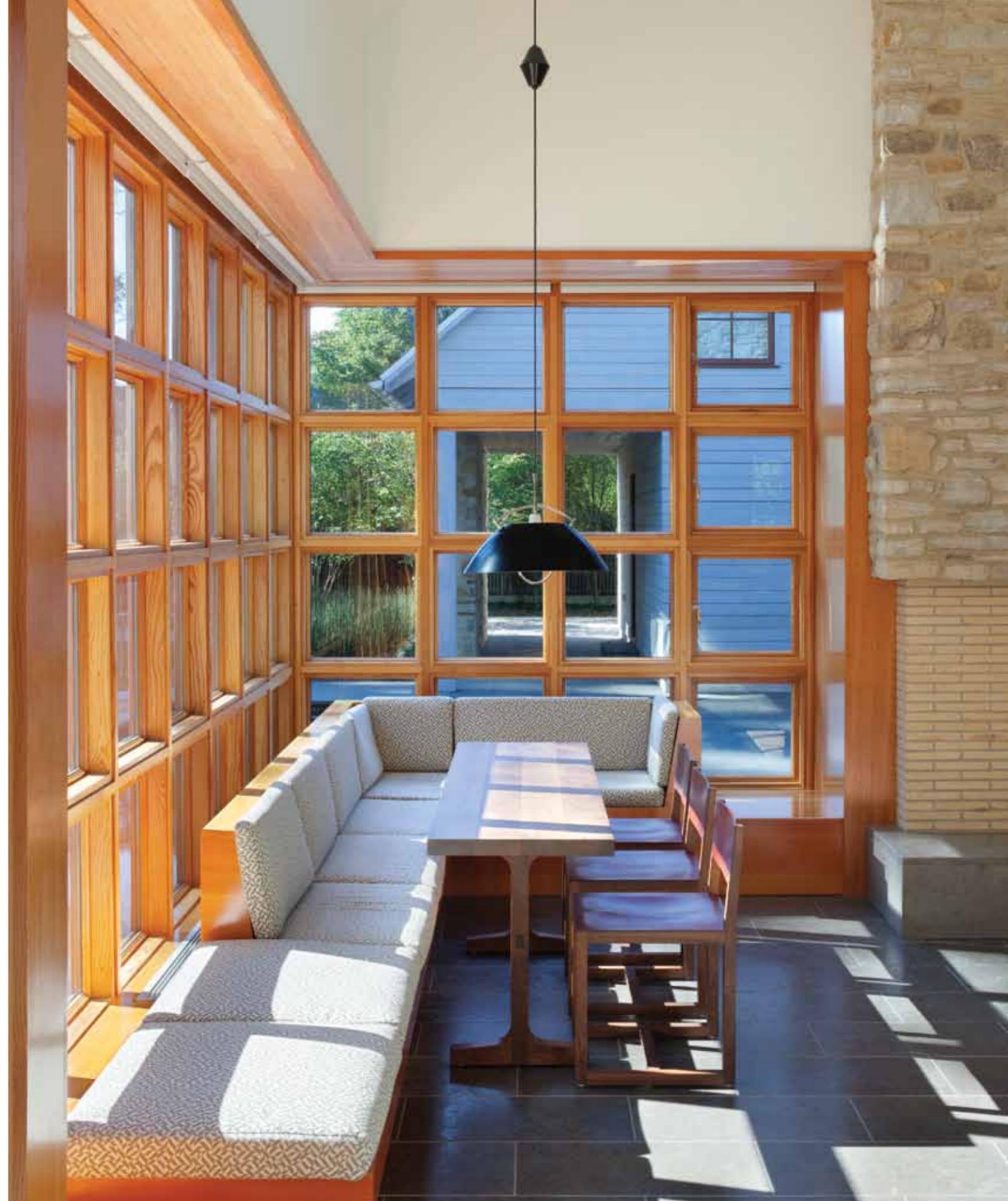
Living and dining areas are combined into a single open space at the heart of the house. The stone-and-brick fireplace wall, fir ceiling above the dining area and limestone floors add color and texture to the pared-down room. The walnut dining table was handcrafted by Nebraska woodworker Andy Colley.



The kitchen (above), with its concrete-topped island, opens to the dining area off the front hallway (below). The barn door slides open to the "away" room at the front of the house. A built-in banquette in the corner of the living area (opposite) offers a spot for admiring views of the pool and garden.



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The L-shaped house is widest at the front to allow room for a modern garden along the sides and rear. Designed by Gregg Bleam, the spare setting of native plantings exemplifies the landscape architect's site-specific Minimalism. "We tried to create a sense of quiet and tranquility," says Bleam.

Like the home's architecture, the landscape is a study in simplicity. Hornbeam trees around the perimeter frame a lawn with a single Jane magnolia. Closer to the house, a shallow reflecting pool extends to a planter filled with horsetail. Entering the home from the traditional front porch, the Zen-like design—with its view of water through a tall window in the hallway—comes as a surprise.

To emphasize the indoor-outdoor connection further, Williams designed a large corner window in the living/dining space at the heart of the main level. Stretching below its gridded opening is a banquette for sipping coffee and contemplating nature. "We imagined that as a place to picnic next to a stream," he says.

While the homeowners wanted rooms open to daylight and views, they weren't enamored with architecture of glass and steel. "I like cozy bungalows and Cape Cods," says the wife. "Modern can seem cold." Williams responded by mixing materials and textures throughout the interiors: dark limestone and oak floors, a stone-and-brick fireplace, Venetian plaster in a bathroom.

A fir-paneled ceiling marks the dining area, where leather chairs are paired with a walnut table crafted by Nebraska woodworker Andy Colley. A nearby barn door slides open to the "away" room at the front of the house, a quiet, book-lined space for reading, working at the computer or listening to music.

The owners insisted the home be eco-friendly and accessible so they can keep their utility bills in check and comfortably age in place. "I wanted it to reflect universal design," says the wife, "so we included a side entrance to accommodate a wheelchair and a bedroom suite on the ground floor. Some of the walls are framed for an elevator, in case we need one in the future." Energy-saving features such as a geo-thermal heating and cooling system, foam-insulated walls and a reflective aluminum roof earned LEED for Homes certification from the U.S. Green Building Council.

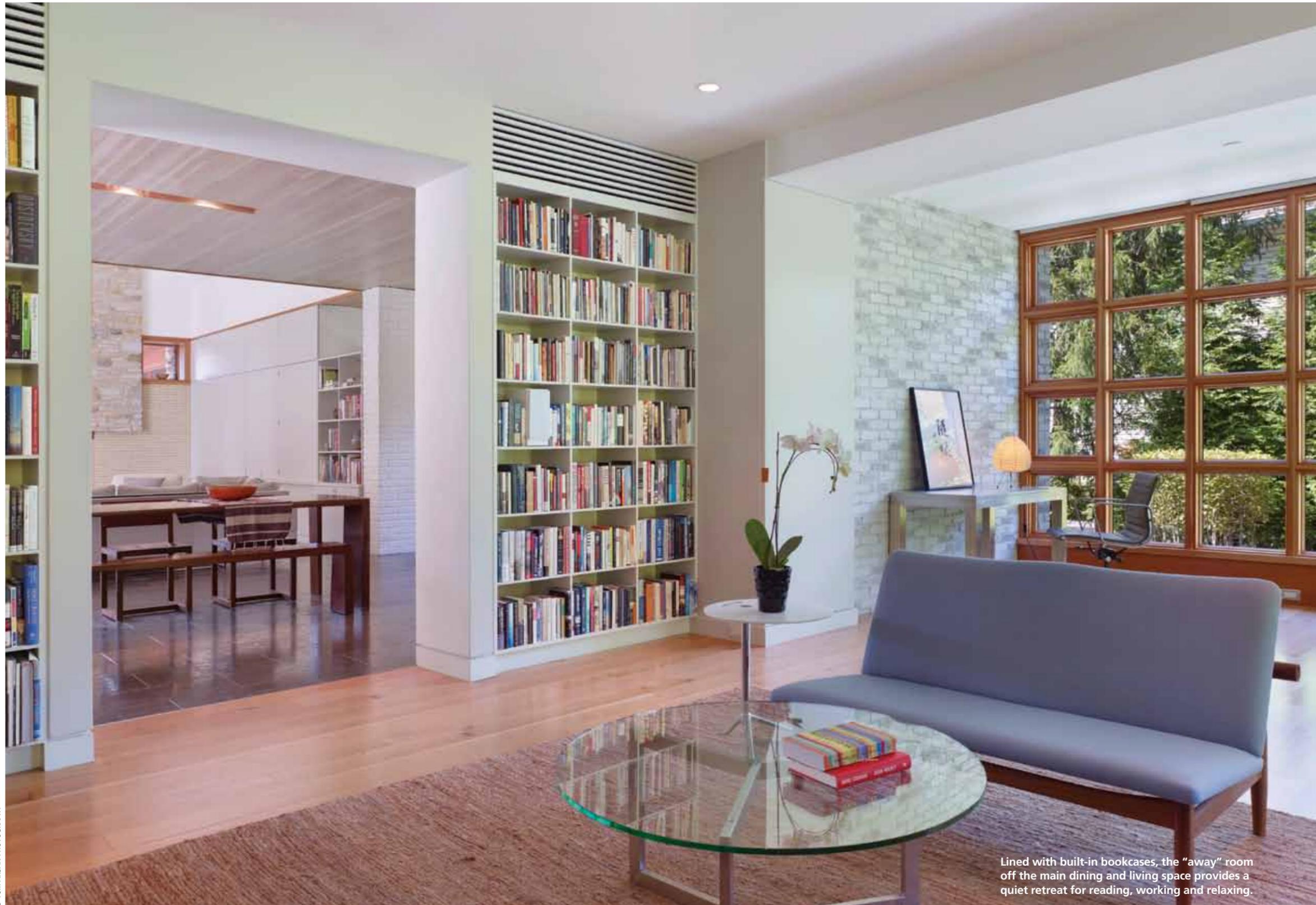
The owners also requested enough space to accommodate visits from their four grown children and grandchildren while keeping the size of the house manageable for the two of them. "They didn't want to have rooms lying around waiting to be used," says project architect Tim Abrams. "There is no formal living or dining room, and no space is overblown or unnecessary." Three bedrooms, including the master suite, occupy the second floor (the ground-floor bedroom is now used by guests) and an office above the garage could be turned into another bedroom or a caretaker's suite.

The house and rear garage are linked by a screened porch abutting the bluestone terrace next to the pool. There, the family can gather and enjoy the view. Says the husband, "It's a good place to pull up a chair and watch the sunlight reflecting off the water." ♦

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Lined with built-in bookcases, the "away" room off the main dining and living space provides a quiet retreat for reading, working and relaxing.

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The reflecting pool and its wooden bridge are visible upon entering the front hall, where a staircase leads to the basement and second floor. The pool extends past a terrace to the garage at the rear of the property.