



# NORDIC STYLE

A design team revives a faded Cleveland Park gem with an airy new floor plan and a Swedish farmhouse vibe

BY CATHERINE FUNKHOUSER  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GORDON BEALL



A geometric abstraction by Karl Benjamin presides over the fireplace mantel in the hall (this page). Landscape architect Lila Fendrick reinstated the generous front stoop and walkway (opposite, left), which had been walled off during a previous renovation. Bleached oak floors and spare, white walls provide a quiet backdrop for a bold Maya Hayuk painting (opposite, right).





Designer Nestor Santa-Cruz sourced re-editions of Danish Modern classics, including the living room's Mayor sofa by Arne Jacobsen, at Furniture From Scandinavia by Annette Rachlin in Georgetown. The room's eclectic mix also includes Barcelona chairs, a cb2 acrylic coffee table and a Swedish stool from Tone on Tone in Bethesda.

The potent trifecta of character, greenery and location lured a couple to DC's picturesque Cleveland Park in 2007. "We're both native Washingtonians and have always enjoyed the cozy charms of the neighborhood," the husband says. "It has a country feel, yet is in walking distance to everything."

For the chance to own a quaint 1905 Dutch Colonial Revival home in the desirable hamlet, the pair initially overlooked some shortcomings—namely dark, carved-up interiors that lacked present-day functionality. Years later, though, they were ready for a change and asked architect Anne Decker and designer Nestor Santa-Cruz to orchestrate a transformation.

The first order of business was to generate more breathing room for a family with two now-teen daughters. Also a top priority: instilling an airy Scandinavian aesthetic. "Our goal was to give a house with small, choppy spaces a flow that worked for modern living," explains the husband, a writer. "We wanted openness and to create a look that resembled a Swedish farmhouse."

Given the lot size, a major addition to the 3,610-square-foot abode wasn't feasible. So Decker devised a plan to gut the rear of the house and bump out the lower level on one side by 166 square feet. These moves, which required city and neighborhood historic-preservation approvals, expanded the tight kitchen and created a continuous great room along the back. As the architect recalls, "Before, the layout was compartmentalized. Now it's a shotgun space, with the great room, breakfast area and kitchen. It's a great gathering spot."

Two sets of French doors flood the back of the house with light, pulling the outside in. The reimagined kitchen—with white cabinets, a natural-walnut island, marble countertops and open shelves—is "a clean-lined, distilled version of a Swedish farmhouse," notes Decker. Brass lighting and hardware add subtle sheen.

The powder room and side entry are contained in the addition, which also houses a mudroom. Toward the front of the house, walls have been shifted to establish a proper hallway and an unimpeded sightline from the main entrance to the great room. At the door to the great room, an existing fireplace "provides a nice moment as you're walking down the hallway toward the breakfast table and the French doors beyond," says Decker.

The owners' colorful trove of abstract art called for a crisp backdrop. "We dipped the whole house in white to create a gallery feel and to celebrate the artwork," the architect explains. A whitewash over the original pine floors "speaks to the homeowners' desire for an airy Swedish look."

ARCHITECTURE: ANNE Y. DECKER, AIA, principal, and LORI APFEL CARDELI, AIA, project manager, Anne Decker Architects, Bethesda, Maryland. DESIGNER: NESTOR SANTA-CRUZ, IIDA, Nestor Santa-Cruz Decoration, Washington, DC. BUILDER: Potomac Valley Builders, Bethesda, Maryland. LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE: LILA FENDRICK, FASLA, Lila Fendrick Landscape Architects, Chevy Chase, Maryland.





In the dining room/library (these pages), architect Anne Decker shifted, aligned and raised the height of the doorways, flanking them with bookshelves. A vintage walnut Parsons table showcases an Azucena re-edition of the Arenzano Tre Fiamme table lamp by Italian architects Gardella and Zanuso. Council Lounge Chairs by Salto & Sigsgaard share space around the table with Wegner-designed Wishbone chairs.



A Scandinavian-inspired lectern (above) designed by Santa-Cruz playfully displays family portraits as if they were rare manuscripts. The piece was handcrafted by Maryland-based furniture maker Mitchell Yanosky.

So do unfussy furnishings. For his part, Santa-Cruz fleshed out the Nordic narrative with re-editions of Danish Modern designs by such masters as Arne Jacobsen, Finn Juhl and Hans J. Wegner. Santa-Cruz's collected, classic-meets-modern scheme combines many of his clients' existing pieces. In the living room, an updated take on Jacobsen's Mayor sofa joins an 18th-century Swedish stool, two Barcelona chairs and an American drop-leaf table from the 1940s.

That's not to say anything goes. Santa-Cruz employed his "curating eye" to edit the mix. "Sometimes when you curate furniture pieces—especially when they come from famous designers of any period—the décor can become a little too museum-like or showroom-like," he notes. "This house doesn't have a feel of perfection."

Family-driven function and meaningful touches prevail in the dining room. The wife, a TV producer, envisioned a multi-tasking space—inspired by "a classic college library"—where the girls could do their homework, explains the designer. Favorite books fill newly installed, built-in shelves. For intimacy, Santa-Cruz specified a slightly moodier neutral—Farrow & Ball's Skimming Stone—for the walls (the only ones on the first floor not painted in Benjamin Moore's White Dove).

Memories of a visit to the library at Austria's University of Graz, where long tables boast tall, glass-domed lamps, spurred the designer to suggest a table lamp over a traditional chandelier. "It's a simple, compelling gesture that's not typical," he says. "I'm always looking for elements that are whimsical or objects that have a different scale."





Santa-Cruz designed the rug anchoring the Restoration Hardware seating arrangement in the great room (above), where a large abstract by Leon Berkowitz is flanked by French doors. Architect Anne Decker's plan expanded the formerly cramped kitchen and created a comfortable, open space for the continuous breakfast area and great room (right).

The clean-lined kitchen (opposite, top) combines white-painted cabinetry and a walnut island. Scandinavian elements include the Danish Modern table and chairs, bar stools and wall clock. A chandelier over the table is a vintage find from DC's Artisan Lamp; a Rohl farmhouse sink (opposite, bottom) nods to nostalgia.



When family members aren't reading or writing in the space, they are entertaining. "We love Friday night dinner there with friends," reveals the husband. "The library has a calming effect on everyone."

By contrast, the family room is a "more loungy, bring-your-iPad-and-watch-Netflix place," as Santa-Cruz describes it. Its arrangement co-mingles easygoing, slipcovered seating with minimalist Danish designs including a coffee table by Poul Kjærholm. "For me, it's about visual and physical comfort," Santa-Cruz observes. "I'm not furnishing and I'm not decorating. I'm translating and advising. I bring completion to my clients' aesthetic lifestyle."

The second floor's two bedrooms and office didn't change with the renovation, but the master bedroom, located in the previously converted attic, got an update. Removing a couple of partition walls created a sense of roominess. Santa-Cruz maximized the quirky space with a Design Within Reach bedstead and integrated nightstands. A Wegner chair picks up the Nordic thread.

The designer's signature blend of style and ease is evident throughout. As he explains, "It's a wonderful balance of European sophistication and American casualness." ♦

*Catherine Funkbouser is an Arlington writer. Gordon Beall is a photographer in Bethesda. For resources, see [homeanddesign.com](http://homeanddesign.com).*



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—NESTOR SANTA-CRUZ

Two Azucena reading lamps by Luigi Caccia Dominioni combine form and function in the master-bedroom aerie. Santa-Cruz selected a low-profile bedstead and &Tradition rugs. A chair by Hans Wegner and a rustic table from the owners’ collection create a space in which to sit and enjoy the view.