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HOME REMODELING

Indoor-Outdoor Solutions

FINDING ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT | BY JOHN BYRD

“Creating a more satisfying relationship between the house and its setting becomes more important to owners as they continue occupying their homes,” explains Sonny Nazemian, founder and president of Michael Nash Design Build & Homes.

“Northern Virginians are blessed with a temperate climate and rich green surroundings,” he adds, “so finding ways to connect the house with what’s just outside your door is a strong local incentive—especially as spring turns into summer.”

Homeowner expectations of a better integrated indoor/outdoor scenario is evolving with each season; so, too, the demand for definitive sight lines linking the house to the grounds. And there’s

call for well-defined outdoor play zones.

To accommodate, the Michael Nash design team is constantly evaluating emerging technologies, grading and landscaping practices, code requirements and interior design trends.

“We’re always expanding to our skills repertoire,” Nazemian says. “Developing our in-house expertise in a variety of specialty areas is one of our primary missions as a company.”

By way of example, the remodeler referenced four recent projects in which the search for best ways to marry house and setting required technical skills not typically offered in-house by other remodelers.

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A flared, 3-way staircase connects a new deck to a ground-level flagstone patio

Eye-catching designs in an outdoor solution to a Vienna home are elaborated in contrasting beige and redwood slats installed in alternating diagonal and parallel lines.



“The home’s contemporary design inspired us to explore a more geometrical landscaping solution... The idea was to present a visual pattern that would catch the eye from several of the rear elevation vantage points.”

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Above: The newly-installed outdoor activity area to this Great Falls contemporary includes circular decking that supports a jacuzzi and endless pool. A “catwalk” extending along the rear elevation to a new slider in master bedroom suite provides a direct walk-out to the pool. Below, a flagstone patio links the lower level rooms to the sun-exposed upper deck. Flagstone walks connecting patio and decking make it easy to segue from snack-time to pool to dinner and back.

Inset: BEFORE. A rolling hill on the north side of the existing lot dipped at a 35-degree angle, making the upper part of the lot a half-story higher than the lower level entrances. For years, the owners thought the backyard couldn’t be developed.

REVISED REAR ELEVATION—PLUS, RE-GRADING—MAKES WAY FOR FAMILY SWIM DECK

A Great Falls family sought an upgraded lower level for their circa-1980s contemporary. They also wanted an outdoor play area with swimming deck. The home’s sloping lot, however, was restrictive.

A rolling hill on the lot’s north side dipped at a 35-degree angle under the back deck, making the upper part of the lot a half-story higher than the lower level entrances. Rainwater routinely accumulated on a small ground level patio. Given these issues, the owners had come to think of the backyard as undevelopable.

When owners John and Eula Bonds asked several remodelers for ideas for a complementary landscape design, the sketches that were provided failed to identify some inherent problems.

“We knew we wanted a company with an unusual breadth of experience,” the homeowner recalls. “So we went back to our research searching for someone with the right combination of design, construction and engineering capabilities.”

Enter Sonny Nazemian.

“The home’s contemporary design inspired us to explore a more geometrical landscaping solution,”

Nazemian says. “I started with circular mid-yard decking that would physically support the jacuzzi and endless pool. The idea was to present a visual pattern that would catch the eye from several of the rear elevation vantage points.”

Part of this entailed replacing the existing deck with a 14’ x 15’ veranda suitable for outdoor dining. But the plan also called for a “personal” catwalk extending along the rear elevation to the master bedroom suite which has been retrofitted with a double slider.

The revisions allow the Bonds to easily transition from bedroom to pool to patio—even on the spur of the moment and after dark.

“My wife and I smile when we open the slider and take in the view,” Bond says. “The change has been great for the whole family—and Eula and I enjoy it daily as it has been designed with our convenience in mind.”

In addition to the swim deck, the Michael Nash team introduced a flagstone patio that links lower level rooms to the sun-exposed upper deck. A stone and flagstone circulation plan connecting patio and decking makes it easy to segue from snack-time to pool to dinner and back.

Post lights, puck lights (below stair risers), and accent landscape lighting make gatherings after dark safe, feasible and lovely to behold.



SUNROOM SEGUES TO OUTDOOR SPACES

The far-reaching scope to an indoor-outdoor solution in a Fairfax home incorporates a hexagonal-shaped sunroom with extensive decking, a ground-level patio and upper deck off the master bedroom.

But for Sanjay and Deepika Sardana, who have occupied the house for 14 years, the real achievement is how well the new sunroom addresses personal requirements regarding views, available light and interior design.

“Our house backs up to a lovely wooded setting, so the lack of views from the rear was a wasted opportunity,” Sanjay recalls. “We recognized early how new square footage might address these possibilities...but didn’t know what was feasible.”

A chance encounter with Sonny Nazemian, however, soon unleashed a series of inspired ideas, such as a Trex-surfaced decking system that accommodates traffic between the old family room and the new sunroom. Then there was the eye-catching deck design, in contrasting beige and redwood slats installed in alternating diagonal and parallel lines. Next came a flared three-way staircase linking the deck to a ground-level flagstone patio.

Other Nazemian innovations included a second-level master bedroom balcony above the sunroom

and custom-designed benches and planters on both levels to define gathering zones.

Of course, nothing gets built in Fairfax County that’s not in strict compliance with building codes. “The backyard was mostly fill dirt,” Nazemian recalls, “which lacked the density needed to support a structure of this size.” Following soil tests, the project team realized they would need to excavate nine feet to properly secure the new addition. Since a traditional basement would be cost-prohibitive, Nazemian specified “footings” linked to a retaining wall built at the far end of the new footprint. The plan saved 40% on the cost of adding a full basement.

Other engineering feats are, likewise, deftly executed to include a horizontal I-beam mounted on vertical supports and concealed in the sunroom walls and provides the under-girding needed for the master bedroom balcony. The ceiling’s slope even allows rainwater drainage. A 12’ x 20’ flagstone patio, while flat to the ground, is secured by a concrete foundation.

More importantly, the upper deck fulfills a long unrequited owner vision.

“It’s very private,” Sanjay says. “My wife and I can sit quietly and enjoy a cup of coffee or tea, or even practice yoga. The kids love it, too. The open air and beautiful view bring a great new pleasure into our lives.”

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—Sonny Nazemian

The rear elevation in a remodeling project in Fairfax that incorporated a hexagonal-shaped sunroom with extensive decking, a ground-level patio and upper deck off the master bedroom.



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The screen porch replete with many decorative touches is accessed from a door off the dining room— a comfortable spot to take in the air.

ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

“Finding architectural context that reconciles the style of the existing house with new indoor/outdoor components is essential to good remodeling,” Nazemian says. “This is often an owner priority—especially in the close-in neighborhoods.”

The program for a McLean family home, for instance, called for two separate additions on the rear of the house. The new construction would be incorporated into a whole house remodel that would include a new front façade and new siding on the entire exterior.

The two-level addition in the middle of the rear elevation would house a first-floor kitchen/family room suite integrated with the existing kitchen’s footprint, as well as a second-level master bedroom suite with spa bath and walk-in closets.

A smaller one-level linking the garage and kitchen was designed to accommodate a mudroom and

added storage as well as a new powder room.

A small grilling deck accessible from the kitchen segues to a screen porch built on a side elevation. The porch is also linked to the formal dining room via a side door.

Outside, the old siding has been replaced with Hardie plank, trim and fascia board; gutters, roof and downspouts are also new, while new exterior windows in varied shapes and sizes enhance visual interest and curb appeal.

The front door is now framed by an arched portico with square columns; a new flagstone walkway links the front door to the driveway.

“We try to find budget-sensitive ways to help owners with school-age children stay in a neighborhood where they’ve established their roots,” Nazemian says. “In this case, we enhanced the charm of the original house—but it’s also much more functional and presentable. That’s the outcome we seek.”



FINDING ROOM FOR A STONE PATIO AND DINING DECK

On a similar note, Omar Dajani and family had outgrown their Fairfax home after 14 years of occupancy. Given the challenges of a narrow “stem pipe” lot and a rear elevation five feet above-grade, a space enlargement integrated with outdoor entertainment zones seemed unlikely. Nonetheless, Dajani asked Sonny Nazemian for an assessment.

The first problem was the home’s rear elevation was also a load-bearing wall that supported the second floor. To make sense of an expansion, designers would have to insinuate a structural support beam balanced on vertical supports between the first and second floor and open-up the rear elevation.

To properly apportion a new “open” living area, two vertical support beams cased in decorative molding now frame a four-stool dining counter

situated between the working kitchen and the new sunroom/breakfast area.

Meanwhile, with double French doors on opposite elevations, the addition offers direct access to a pair of well-articulated outdoor components: a dining deck on the north side and a flagstone patio with water feature to the south.

Outside, two very different gathering places elevate the project’s functionality and beauty. A dining deck on the west side of the new rear elevation provides the family with a convenient everyday spot for supping together while enjoying the breeze and leafy views. A stonework patio on the opposite side of the new addition features a working fountain with tile-topped circular benches and an outdoor kitchen complete with gas grill.

“My family loves these improvements,” Dajani says. “There’s an abundance of places to sit quietly, but it’s also a dynamic environment for playing together. We are especially pleased that we got a beautiful new home without moving.”

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Above: A stonework patio on the opposite side of the new addition features a working fountain with tile-topped circular benches and an outdoor kitchen complete with gas grill.

Inset: A dining deck is one of several outdoor components in a remodeled Fairfax home. The plan offers the family a convenient everyday spot for supping together while enjoying the breeze and leafy views.