

Summer 2006
Maryland Edition

Washington Home & Garden

A McLean
Remodel that's

Better Than New

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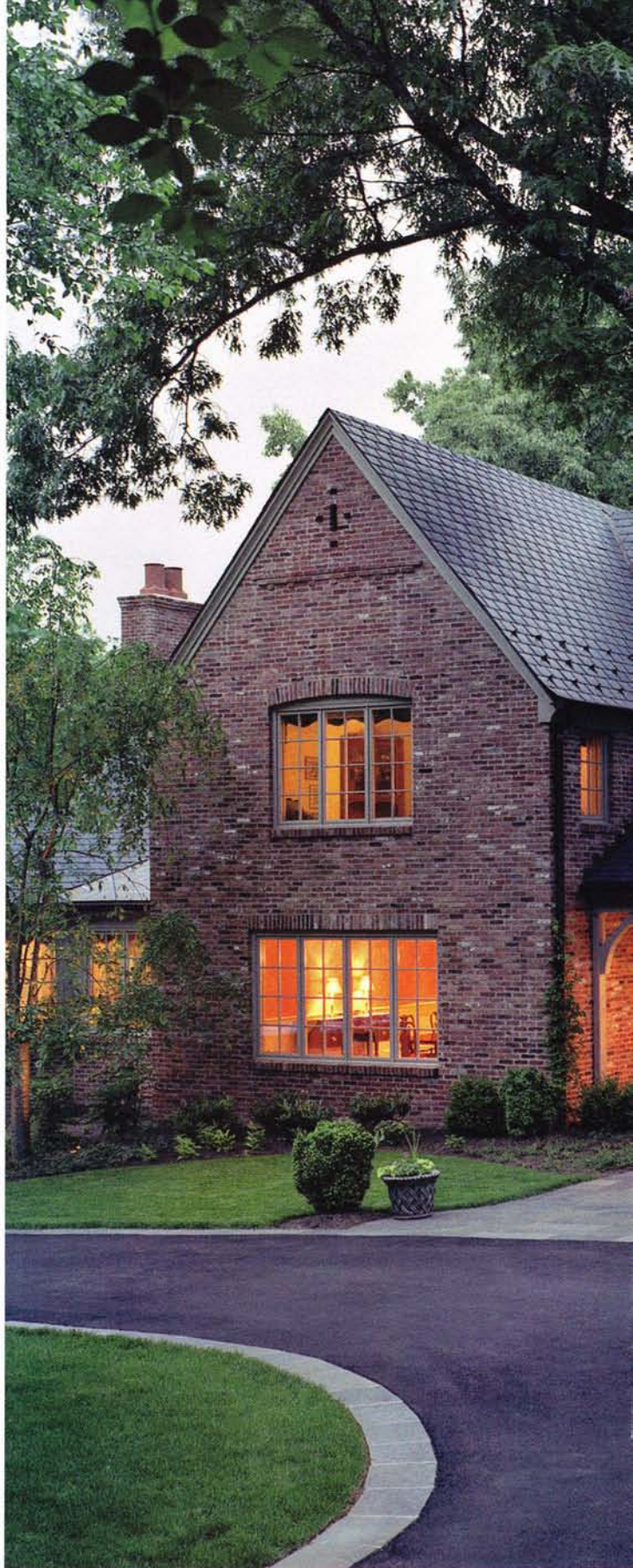
Better THAN New



A redone rambler makes the most of its gorgeous site.

SITTING IN A CLEARING ATOP a sunny knoll is a thoughtfully renovated house that suits the site and the family as if it were the last piece in Mother Nature's puzzle. Behind it, gardens give way to pastoral rolling hills that undulate toward a pond in the valley below. A dense necklace of trees encircles the property that lies like a secret just minutes from Tysons Corner.

Although the house is large, "it doesn't look enormous from the front," says the homeowner. Nestled in the nook created by the bumped-out dining room is a welcoming English-style front porch.

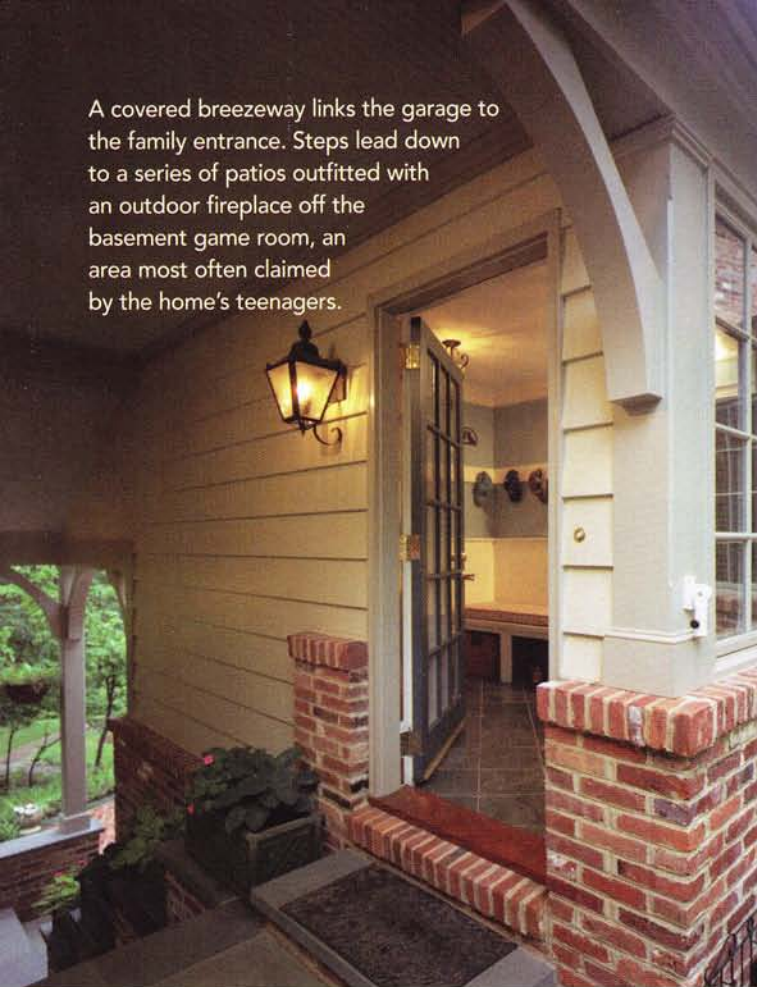


BY MARION BUTTERWORTH



PHOTOGRAPHED BY KENNETH WYNER, courtesy of Richard Leggin Architects and Macon Construction

A covered breezeway links the garage to the family entrance. Steps lead down to a series of patios outfitted with an outdoor fireplace off the basement game room, an area most often claimed by the home's teenagers.



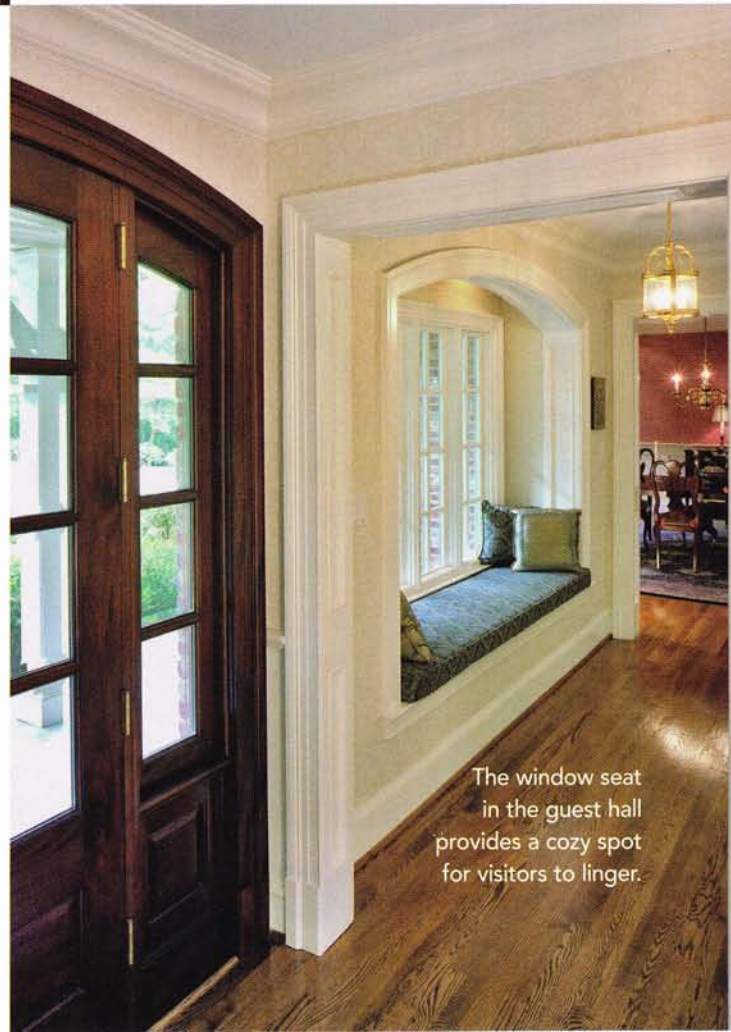
The exposure of the rooms was one of the homeowners' primary concerns. The back of the house had a south-southwest orientation. They wanted to capture views of the pond and the abundant natural light in the most important living spaces—the kitchen, family room, home office and master bedroom.”

“Before the renovation the kitchen was on the front of the house. The living room was an enormous 1960s style, long, ‘aircraft carrier’ room,” says the homeowner, not a space she could see her family using often. She envisioned a family room “filled with that wonderful light.” The family got that and more after hiring Maryland architect Dick Leggin.

The soul of architecture is to make people feel comfortable in spaces where they work, live and play. Leggin does not only that, but also designs renovations that are at home in the neighborhood. He does more than design buildings—he understands how people's surroundings make

With its gracious sense of belonging and tranquil views, this home is the result of a stunning collaboration between architect, contractor and client. Originally built in 1964, the homeowner's first impression was of a “pretty little ranch, well-built, that had been tweaked” by previous owners and situated on a magnificent lot of nearly five acres in McLean. Dick Leggin of Richard Leggin Architects described it as “a basic three-bedroom rambler.” The property was perfect, but the house, says the homeowner, didn't jive with how a family of five lived today. “It had a tiny kitchen, three tiny bedrooms, a full basement,” and, under the house, an unusual “tandem garage, in which two cars were parked front to back.”

“We wanted a house that belonged in the setting. We liked the country feel of the existing one, but we wanted a big kitchen, a big family room, and a bathroom with each bedroom,” and, of course, a bigger, more convenient garage.



The window seat in the guest hall provides a cozy spot for visitors to linger.



The garage, once beneath the house, is now well-situated for easy access. The old garage is now unfinished storage space.

them feel; he creates an environment that meets their needs and desires within a given budget.

For this project, he preserved the country aesthetic that charmed the owners, while at the same time giving them beautifully proportioned rooms that fit the way we live today—informal space for gathering, his and hers main level home offices with everyday necessities like storage and laundry close at hand.

Along with a new wing that contains the family room, Leggin added a three-car garage that is angled out from the house to take advantage of the lot and bring its entrance up to ground level. A covered breezeway from the garage to the new family entrance offers a glimpse of the views that lie beyond. The new family entry, graced by the old front door, gives onto what some would call the most important part of the house: a separate mudroom and laundry room which, in turn, lead into the family room.

Eventually the house grew from about 4,000 square feet to 10,000 (including the finished

basement), sprouting both up and out. “We started [the renovation] without knowing exactly how much we’d change the house,” says the homeowner. A cost plus contract with Macon Construction allowed the project to evolve without change orders and at its own pace.

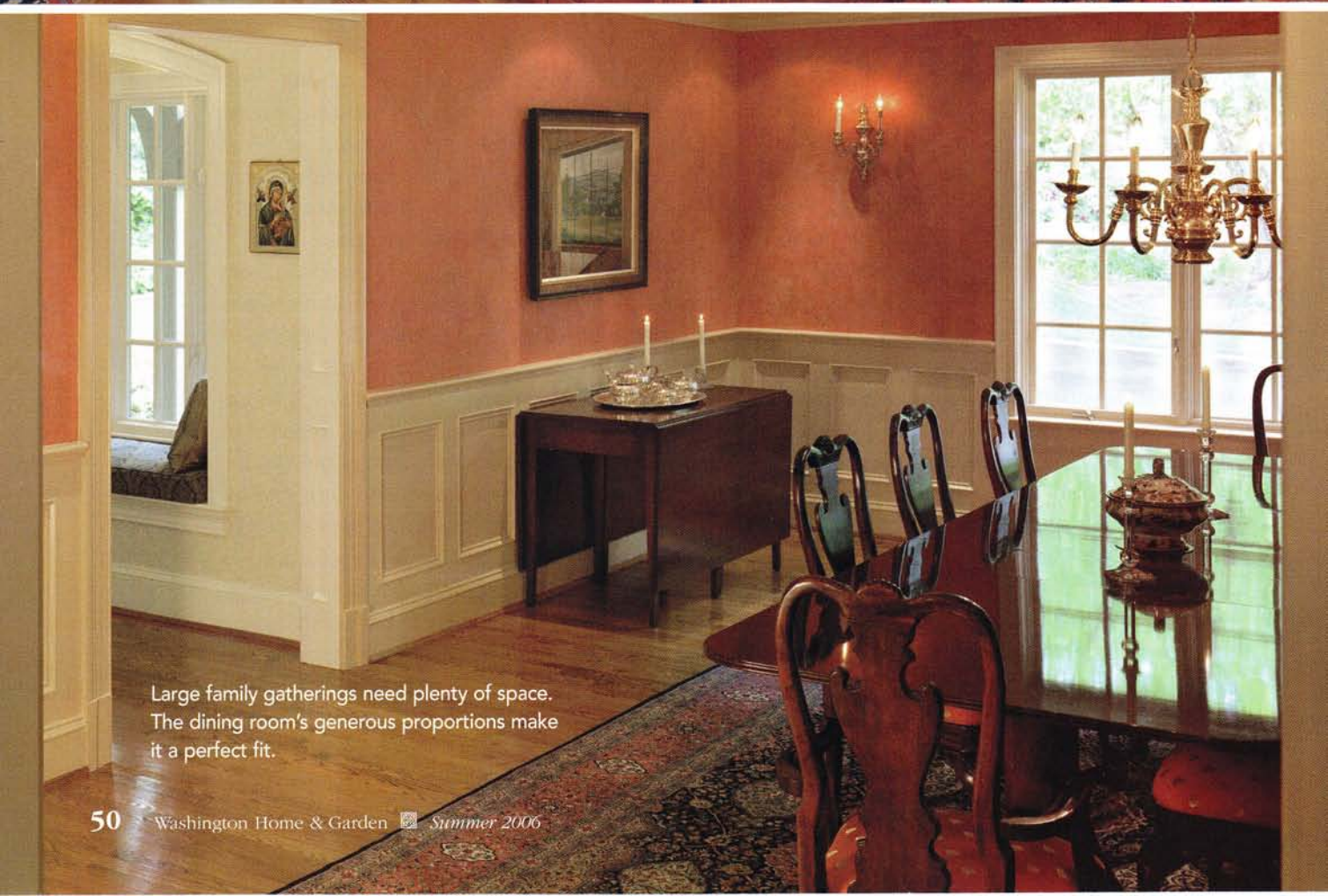
On the main level, Leggin expanded the front of the house, and what were two small bedrooms became a spacious dining room. He subdivided the living room, creating a library and home office, separated by pocket French doors. The kitchen, now more than double in size, migrated to the back of the house where light pours into it.

“We took off the roof and attic floor and increased the height of the walls, says Carl Mahany, vice president of Macon Construction, so that there are now eight and a half foot ceilings on the lower level. The new family room has ten foot ceilings. We also completely replaced all existing systems.”

Upstairs, above the kitchen, the new master bedroom suite is equally luminous with sunlight.



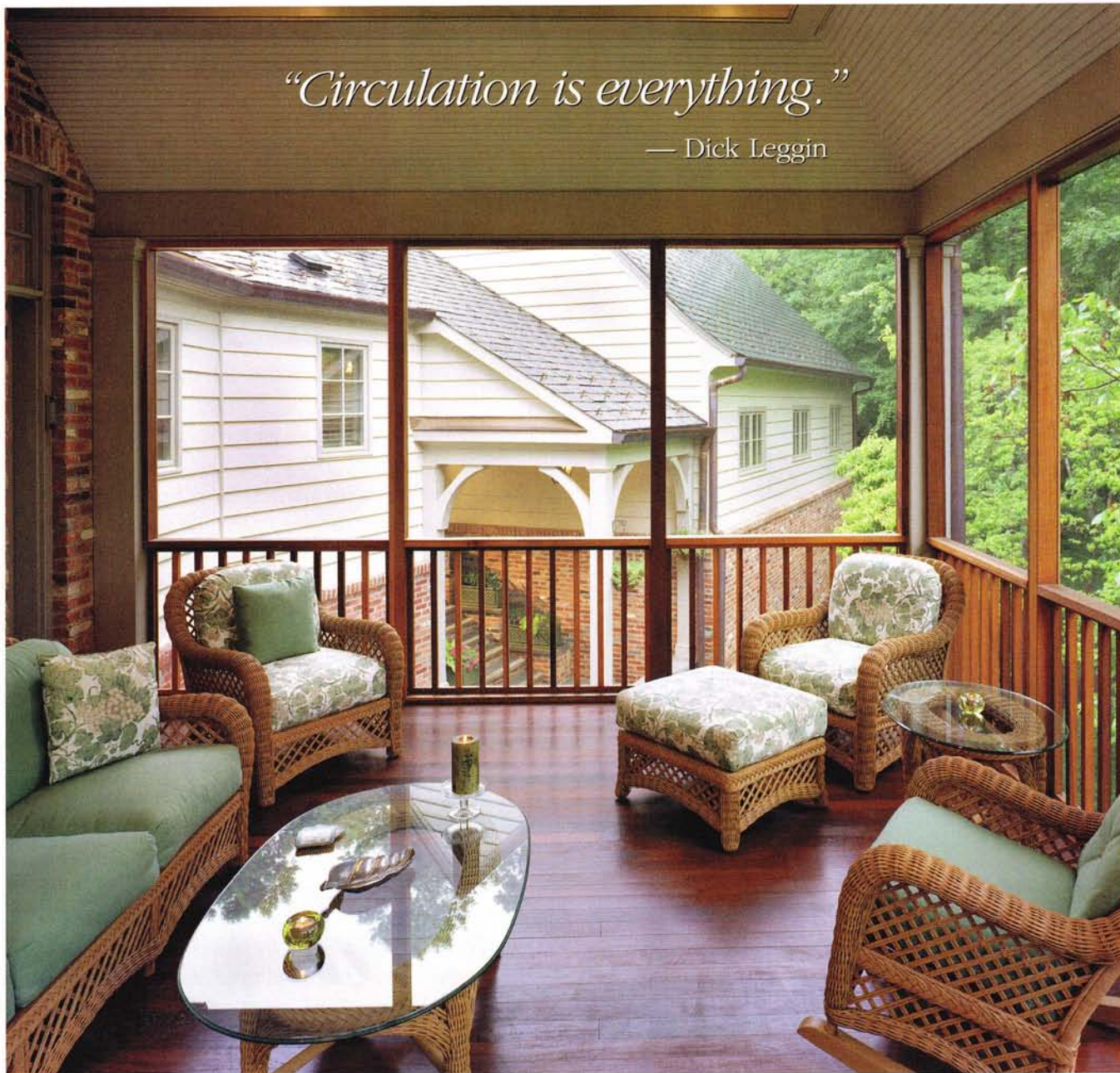
The back of the house was enlarged to accommodate a large, sunny eat-in kitchen. It flows into the family room without being entirely open to it so that noise doesn't travel as readily from room to room.



Large family gatherings need plenty of space. The dining room's generous proportions make it a perfect fit.

“Circulation is everything.”

— Dick Leggin



The other three new bedrooms, each with its own bath, are welcome changes over the former first floor cramped ones.

In pursuit of unpretentious elegance, Leggin, eschewing the grandeur of a soaring two-story foyer with central staircase, retained the original entry hall. He created, instead, a stair hall “tucked out of the way” to the right of the entrance “like in old Chevy Chase houses” and a guest hall to the left, where a coat closet and powder room are conveniently located. To compliment the

Located off the family room, the screen porch was a must. “I love it,” says the homeowner. “I grew up in Williamsburg and everyone has one there.”

sight lines from front to back, he crafted a wide transverse gallery hall. “Circulation is everything,” he says. “You don’t have to have big, wide open spaces.” Sight lines from front to back and side to side “give a sense of spaciousness and openness,” he explains.



TOP: Amply sized and inviting without being ostentatious, the stair hall has French doors that open onto the front porch.

BOTTOM: A coffered ceiling in the family room is just one of many decorative details that make this house unique.



Working in tandem with Leggin were construction managers Mahany and Michael Kanze of Macon Construction in Kensington. Mahany oversees a project from its inception through the “closed shell” phase. At that point, his partner Michael Kanze, whom Mahany describes as “an incredibly talented craftsman and generous, patient person,” takes over, working with architect and homeowner to fine tune details that personalize the home, such as trims, moldings, paneling, built-ins and paint.

“Something I got that I didn’t expect,” reveals the homeowner, “is lovely woodwork—real wainscoting, wood panels, arches and door frames—all very nicely done. All of it is my taste. I was consulted every step of the way.” Kanze clarifies: “Leggin designs three or four styles of trim or moldings, and we mock it up for the homeowner to see. We call it ‘show and tell.’ We have all of our own carpenters.”

“We had respect for the challenge,” says the husband. “It was quite an experience but definitely worth it.” His wife likens the renovation to childbirth; she says that you quickly forget the pain. “I would do it again. This feels more like my own home than any place I’ve ever lived. It just feels comfortable—like I belong. It’s a nice place in the world. It was a hard and long but ultimately rewarding process.”

“This project is a fine example of the quality of work that can be accomplished at a reasonable cost when the owner, architect and contractor work as a team,” says Mahany. 🏠

Architecture: Richard Leggin Architects P.C.
 Construction: Macon Construction
 Kitchen and Baths: Nancy Thornett Kitchens
 Landscape: DCA Landscape Architects