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# NATURAL HIGH

CITY DWELLERS MOVE TO A MODERNIST RANCH HOME UPDATED WITH AN OPEN FLOOR PLAN AND A REFINED PALETTE.

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ARCHITECTURE / KEVIN TOUKOUMIDIS, DSPACE STUDIO  
INTERIOR DESIGN / ELIZABETH PASQUINELLI, DEBAUN STUDIO  
HOME BUILDER / NEIL CORCORAN, C&S GENERAL CONTRACTORS, INC.  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE / CAROL HEFFERNAN, HEFFERNAN LANDSCAPE DESIGN

In southern Lake County lies an oasis—the woodlands preservation village of Riverwoods. The beauty of the area is what led Josh Weiss, an executive at a lighting company, and his wife, Natalie, to leave Lincoln Park and purchase a late-1970s ranch in the community. “Being surrounded by nature is energizing,” Josh says, noting the thrill their two young children find in the landscape. “When we came to look at the house, they would run outside and roll in the grass,” adds Natalie.

The couple, who have a keen appreciation for architecture, were instantly drawn to the painted cedar-clad dwelling originally designed by renowned Chicago architect Milton Schwartz. Despite its 15 skylights, however, inside the home felt dark and closed off. So the couple invited architect Kevin Toukoumidis to update the interior and build a new rear addition. “They have a wonderful modernist aesthetic,” muses Toukoumidis. “So we hit it off right away.”

The project required a careful balance of maintaining the integrity of Schwartz’s modernist design while altering rooms just enough to maximize the natural light. “It’s a special setting, and the house was designed to integrate with the landscape,” says Toukoumidis. “It’s a very understated, elegant house with clean lines.” But, he points out, “The interior did not function like a house should function today.”

“Kevin suggested a few minor tweaks that made a huge difference,” says Josh. For example, Toukoumidis, working with general contractor Neil Corcoran, widened the main hallway by several feet and eliminated a large portion of the wall between the living and family areas. A new two-sided steel-plated fireplace with a porcelain tile surround can be enjoyed from either space. “We preserved the existing architecture, but we simplified it and made it fade quietly into the background,” explains Toukoumidis. “We felt that the furnishings and art should take center stage.”

“WE MADE SURE THAT EVERYTHING REFERENCES ONE ANOTHER AND MARRIES THE DESIGN ELEMENTS THROUGHOUT.”

—ELIZABETH PASQUINELLI

Finding the balance between contemporary and cozy was key. “We wanted modern, but we weren’t looking for something stark and cold,” says Josh. “The old house was full of tile and dark wood that fully absorbed the sunlight.” To add brightness, walls were painted crisp white and new European white oak flooring was installed throughout. Juxtaposing the lightness are black-painted windows that keep the look sophisticated but subtle. “A curated palette of materials creates a quiet elegance that emphasizes views of the landscape,” Toukoumidis explains. “There’s this great interplay between interior and exterior.”

Even the jaw-dropping LED chandelier in the living room references the tree branches in a modern way, notes interior designer Elizabeth Pasquinelli, who collaborated with Toukoumidis. It hangs above a square steel-and-glass cocktail table that is a nod to the architect’s fireplace design. “We made sure that everything references one another and marries the design elements throughout,” she points out.

Another important factor was the plethora of light throughout the home, which is a dream for any designer. It also means every nuance plays a starring role: Everything from the tufting on the sofa to the grains in the flooring are on full display. “It’s wonderful,” remarks Pasquinelli. “In a lot of homes, the details get lost. Here, there’s an overflow of natural light, so everything is showcased.”

While the designer chose to keep most of the furnishings decidedly neutral in deference to the verdant surroundings, she also made sure to plant occasional pops of color throughout. “In their former home they had water views, but they don’t have those anymore, so we brought the blues from the lake back in,” Pasquinelli says, pointing to the robin’s-egg blue wool upholstery on the lounge chairs in the family room. And, in an even bolder approach, a cocktail table with an orange wool top pops against the deep wall color in the more casual office.

Visible from every major room, the exterior has also been updated by landscape designer Carol Heffernan, who extended the back lawn to create more “playable space” and built a new ipe-accented counter with a concrete waterfall top to house the grill. A mix of native grasses, evergreens, boulders and a Japanese maple likewise enhance the front façade. “We tried to give them as much color and texture as possible in such a dark spot,” Heffernan says.

For Josh and Natalie, the sounds of the city have been replaced with birds chirping and rustling leaves, and an owl starts to hoot every afternoon at 4 p.m. “It’s so peaceful out here, but we’re not far from anything,” Natalie says. “It puts you at one with nature, and that’s pretty cool.”



For the family room, architect Kevin Toukoumidis designed a two-sided steel fireplace with a Fiandre porcelain surround from Transceramica, creating a cozy focal point for the Montauk Sofa sectional and armchairs from DWR. The wooden side table is from Y Living and the Antrim rug is from Rexx Rug.



A tufted sofa from Room and Board, armchairs by Fritz Hansen from Haute Living and a bench by Bernhardt from Y Living surround a modern cocktail table in the formal living room. The chandelier and recessed lights are from Tech Lighting.

Atop a cowhide-and-bamboo pile rug from Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams, a plush leather lounge sofa from CB2 and an armchair by Gus Modern from Stitch Chicago turn the office into an extension of the family room. Toukoumidis collaborated with consultant Anne Kustner on the lighting design.



**Below, left:** Hand-painted Bianco Venatino marble wall tile from Tile Gallery adds a pop of color and pattern to the breakfast area, which is illuminated by an oversized pendant from Tech Lighting.

**Below, right:** At one end of the new gas fireplace in the master bedroom, integrated black steel shelving from Art Metal Design Studio provides additional space for storage and display.





**Above:** A wallcovering by Elitis from Donghia complements the porcelain tile from Stone Source in the powder room. The custom porcelain sink is by Fiandre from Transceramica, and the faucet is from Studio41.

**Left:** Comprised of Fiandre onyx porcelain slab from Transceramica, black steel from Art Metal Design Studio and oak planks from Kährs, the custom fireplace by dSpace Studio floats in the center of the master bedroom. The bedside pendants are from Tech Lighting.



In the backyard, a new concrete waterfall countertop with ipe wood accents by Heffernan Landscape Design houses a built-in grill and an outdoor refrigerator, both from Lynx. In addition to adding more lawn space, landscape designer Carol Heffernan eliminated undesirable "weed trees" and incorporated select ornamental trees.