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BY CHRISTIANNA MCCAUSLAND
PHOTOGRAPHED BY ALAN GILBERT

Natural wonder

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WHEN STEVEN RUSSEL, PRESIDENT OF THE RUSSEL AUTOMOTIVE Group, set about building a home on 11 acres in the Green Spring Valley, he envisioned the house as a bachelor pad. But when Russel met and became engaged to Beth Goldsmith, the project switched from swingin' single to happy homemaker—with a few changes to the master bedroom closet, of course.

Before Goldsmith entered the picture, Russel had compiled a design team consisting of architect Jay Brown, J. Paul Builders and interior designer Jay Jenkins. From the beginning, it was clear Russel was prepared to let the professionals do their job with little interruption.

"Steve came to me and said 'I want you to do my house. When you are done, call me and I'll show up with my luggage,'" Jenkins recalls. Russel's one dictum was that the house be constructed of stone, wood and glass, and that the color palette be natural and neutral.

"I two days after the engagement, Goldsmith arrived at Jenkins' office and loved what she saw. "My wife is the female version of me," says Russel. "We have similar tastes." Lucky for him that was the case, because his design team was well on its way.

Working together, Brown, Jenkins and landscape architect Bob Jackson created a cohesive design that fit perfectly with the site and Russel's personal style. Because the team collaborated from





the start, “you get less layering where it’s like, here’s the architecture then the interior design gets laid on top of it and then the landscape,” explains Brown. “The effect is more woven.”

For Brown, the Russel project offered a rare opportunity to flex his contemporary design muscles. “To be able to create a genre of architecture that’s different than what you’d normally see, in the Valley in particular, was certainly fun for us,” he notes. The resulting structure is masculine yet graceful. Tall, linear proportions come together into monolithic planes that are both singular and at one with the natural setting.

The front of the house is decidedly grounded in the landscape, but as you move through the entry and deeper into the home, it gradually opens until you reach the rear façade, which is almost entirely glass. Although the house has a relatively small footprint, the spaciousness of the volumes and the openness of the rear give the sense of more square footage than really exists. And the use of stone and concrete on both the inside and the exterior, as well as the preponderance of glass, blurs the line between the structure and its site.

“It creates the enigma of being indoors or outdoors and that is what makes this home interesting,” says Brown. While not a “green” home, the Russel residence embraces its natural surroundings with the shape of its footprint and with features like the screen porch, which is something of a dramatic, oversized gazebo space. Other touches bring nature to the fore, such as the unique gutter system that gathers water and sends it spiraling groundward via elegant copper chains.

Since the Russel home puts architecture on stage, the challenge for Jenkins was to present a design that didn’t overpower the architecture and that was durable enough to be dog-proof and low maintenance for the then-bachelor’s lifestyle. Jenkins concluded the best approach for creating a space intended to be pristine was choosing the highest-quality materials available.

For the first floor he selected large quartz stone, which not only complements the exterior stone, it is durable enough to withstand the traffic of dog paws. (Goldsmith Russel has a dog and Russel had three already, bringing the family brood to four.) Jenkins also



Captians



Captions

drew on the theme of large-scale concrete architectural detailing put forth by Brown's concrete trellis over the entryway when he designed the 10-foot concrete fireplace surround that weighs about 4,000 pounds. Next, Jenkins selected the coffee-colored walnut that is used in the entire home, from the kitchen cabinets to the furniture to the paneled walls. "I felt that in this contemporary environment, continuity was incredibly important," explains Jenkins. "It comes back to the importance of the integrity of each of the materials." While the color scheme respects this highly edited design, using predominantly buff shades with pops of color, Jenkins added interest through texture and art. He upholstered the bedroom walls with polished wool, and selected sofas and chaises covered in buclé and worsted wool, as well as occasional chairs in leather.

Goldsmith Russel says the design is more contemporary than her previous home, but



Captions





Architect Jay Brown, Levin/Brown & Associates Inc., Baltimore, 410-581-0101
Interior design Jay Jenkins, Jenkins Baer Associates, Baltimore, 410-727-4100
Builder J. Paul Builders LLC, Stevenson, 410-602-9070
Landscaping Bob Jackson Landscapes Inc., Owings Mills, 410-386-1620
Kitchen design Trish Houck, Kitchen Concepts, Ellicott City, 410-461-3510
Lighting Jones Lighting Specialists, Towson, 410-628-1010
Electronics Starr Systems, Baltimore, 410-494-4310
Upholstery Iello & Co., Baltimore, 410-243-1163
Carpeting Greenspring Carpet Source, Timonium, 410-561-9200
Custom millwork Connor Corp., Baltimore, 410-523-8490



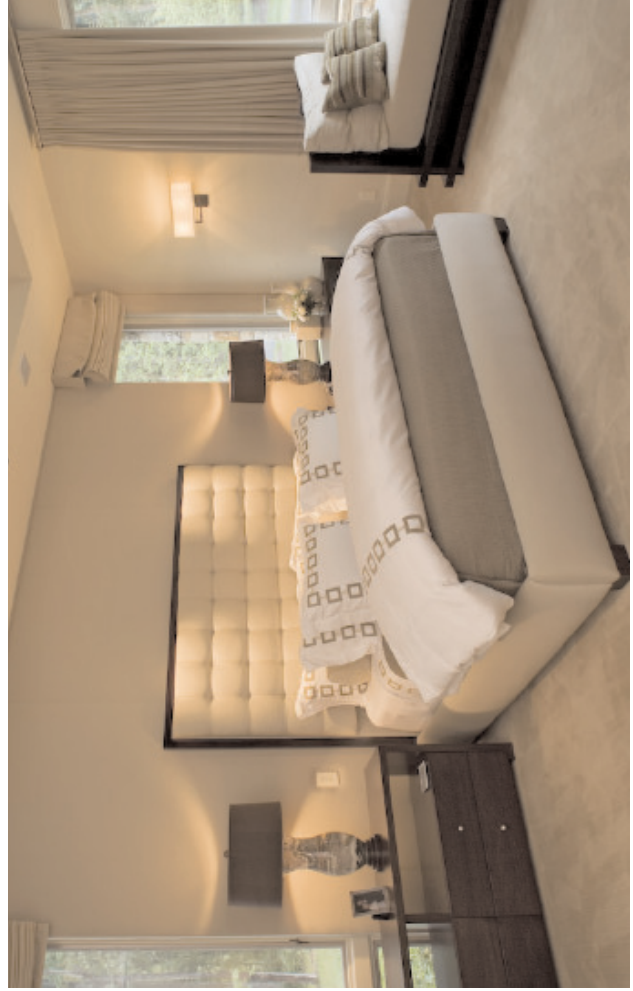
not masculine. The only change she asked for after meeting Jenkins was redesigning the master bedroom closet to accommodate shoe cubbies and open rack space for her and closed cabinets for Russel. An avid art collector, she also took over the selection of art for the home. As befits newlyweds (the Russels were married in May on the home's screened porch), Goldsmith Russel's collection features mostly couples in different positions of loving repose. Each room seems to gather its personal tone from a piece of artwork, be it the subdued Picasso entering the cloistered bedroom, or Chagall's "Lovers in Ochre" in the open plan living room.

The home is reminiscent of a gallery space not only for its art collection but in its simplicity. As in a gallery, lighting was extremely important. "We really needed to pick up details and make them pop, and lighting is the chief way to do that," says Jenkins. While most of the lighting is subtle, the entry hall features two dramatic

chandeliers made of color-stabilized PVC plastic. "They were the one thing that concerned me," says Goldsmith Russel. "But Jay was right. They look just like clouds floating in the entry hall."

Both husband and wife have their own special places in the house. Russel enjoys the screened porch, which has a dramatic high ceiling and a view overlooking the stone-encased lap pool. Goldsmith Russel likes to spend the morning doing puzzles on the chaise lounge in the living room. Both agree that though it's a comfortable home, it has a sense of drama.

The first night the couple arrived at their new house, they were coming from a Ravens game so Jenkins left all the lights burning. "They called at 10 o'clock at night and they were beside themselves," says Jenkins. "They immediately walked in and felt that they were home, and that's the greatest compliment anyone can give me." □





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