

Worth the wait

*After 10 years, a city
home gets a pool*

Late for dinner

*Is the formal dining room
a tired idea?*

Quick study

*A former schoolhouse
gets high marks*

Inside.
Outside.
Home.

Abode cville

AUGUST 2015

The glass house

In Albemarle, a prominent wall of windows pulls the outdoors inside

Meeting the eye

A RURAL RETREAT SHINES IN THE DETAILS



BY ERIKA HOWSARE PHOTOGRAPHY BY VIRGINIA HAMRICK

Second homes are all about contrast: the difference between the weekday place and the getaway. Tom and Jenny Becherer live in a historic neighborhood in Alexandria—a bustling urban environment where the homes are mostly a century or more old. Ten years ago, they found the spot that would provide the perfect foil: 21 acres in Western Albemarle, where they could enjoy a private rural existence from within a new and modern house.

“I wanted to feel like when we’re inside, we’re outside,” says Tom Becherer. The land here is gently sloping, with a wedge of open fields enclosed by forest. The couple bought the property 10 years ago and first built a traditional-style horse barn to hold their Peruvian Pasos. Dark board fencing and the red-and-white barn create a pristine pastoral scene that spills out from the house site.

As the Becherers—who head an IT firm together—searched for an architect to design their house, they perused a book about modern style farmhouses. “We wanted something that evoked an earlier period, but we liked the clean lines of modern architecture,” says Tom.

They were drawn to a house in the book designed by Washington-based architect Robert Gurney. In particular, they loved a wall of windows in that project, and pointed to that photo when they eventually found themselves meeting with Gurney to begin the design process. “I want my whole house to look like that,” Tom remembers saying.

With light and views as a priority, Gurney arrived at a scheme that would maximize visual contact with the outdoors. The basic design, which is a trio of pavilions arranged in a U shape, also achieves another major goal: to gracefully designate public and private spaces, allowing for a balance of togetherness and separation among the occupants (the couple, their two children and frequent guests).

“We wanted everybody to have their own space,” says Tom. “And we wanted guests to have a distinct part of the house.”

The three pavilions are straightforward in their assigned functions. Starting from the parking area, there is a garage with guest quarters above (which shares a roof with a large screened porch). Next comes the great room, which fully occupies the second pavilion. Third is the family space: bedrooms, bathrooms, office and theater.

Along the bottom of the U, an elevated blue-stone terrace draws a bold underline overlooking the pastures. On the opposite side, the three pavilions create a courtyard, a shady cove defined by a stacked-stone wall that intimately connects the house to the protected forest view.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 27



Each of the pavilions have designated functions. The second, center pavilion houses the great room—living, dining and kitchen all in one. And, though it’s only 1,000 square feet, visually it seems much larger, thanks in part to the high ceilings.

“I wanted to feel like when we’re inside, we’re outside.”



In the third pavilion are the private spaces: bedrooms, bathrooms, office and theater. The master suite has views to the pasture and opens through French doors onto the terrace. A glass-enclosed bumpout makes room for the master bath.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

Simple and subtle

There is a geometric purity to the Becherer's house: Each pavilion looks like an iconic house shape, but with rooflines that are deliberately more steeply pitched, tweaking the form that's most familiar in Central Virginia. From a distance, the effect is one of simplicity, with white-painted cypress siding and a black metal roof creating a cool, quiet impression.

Zooming in, however, the house begins to reveal a richness of detail. The screened porch, for example, is clad in mahogany, making a handsome dark-red accent to the otherwise neutral exterior palette. A glass-enclosed bumpout on the third pavilion makes room for the master bath and adds surprising complexity to the form of the house.

Gurney channeled his clients' wish for time-honored materials (wood, stone, metal) into a building that's rigorous in its modernity. “If you look at a lot of contemporary homes, I think they're cold,” says Tom. In this case, white walls are meant to recede so that the exterior views, entering through sweeping windows divided by black framing in Mondrian-like compositions, can provide color and warmth. White oak flooring and built-in wooden cabinetry ground the

interior with organic textures. So do tooled leather furniture, animal skins and saddles, some of which harken to Jenny Becherer's native Peru.

Textures of home

The high roof peaks provide more than a distinct exterior look. “The center volume is only 1,000 square feet, but it feels a lot bigger because of the high ceiling,” says Tom.

The great room, like the house overall, initially seems extremely simple: kitchen, dining area and living area line up like soldiers between long banks of windows. Yet the details, like the two-tone kitchen cabinets echoing wooden panels on the opposite wall, subtly enliven the space. A chunky, geometric block of white marble forms the fireplace surround, and the hearth is made of metal.

In the family wing, the tall roof peak makes space for rooms that, despite being on the second floor, still have high ceilings. A bedroom here bathes in light from two rhythmic sets of three skylights, and the Becherer kids—now ages 21 and 10—have a pair of built-in desks in the upstairs hallway. Their bathrooms, done like all others with basic white subway tile and dark gray floors, are contained within the center of the pavilion, but still enjoy daylight through frosted interior windows.

The master suite, meanwhile, overlooks the pasture view and opens through French doors onto the terrace. Even with its openness to the vistas, it feels protected, as though miles away from the entry sequence and guest quarters.

The Becherers spend holidays here and escape for weekends whenever they can. “We do a lot of entertaining down here,” says Tom—including an annual company picnic that includes a barbecue-laden table the length of the terrace, plus a live band.

“The kids love being out here and running around. We've had a million bonfires over the last 10 years, and hopefully we'll have a million more.”

THE BREAKDOWN

House: 3,400 square feet, garage/guest: 1,800 square feet, total: 5,200 square feet

Structural system: Wood framing and trusses

Exterior material: Painted cypress shiplap siding, cement board panels, bluestone

Interior finishes: Quarter sawn white oak flooring, white marble tile, white oak and walnut millwork, white marble slab fireplace surround

Roof materials: Black standing seam metal

Window system: Marvin

Mechanical system: Geothermal

General contractor: Shelter Associates LTD.