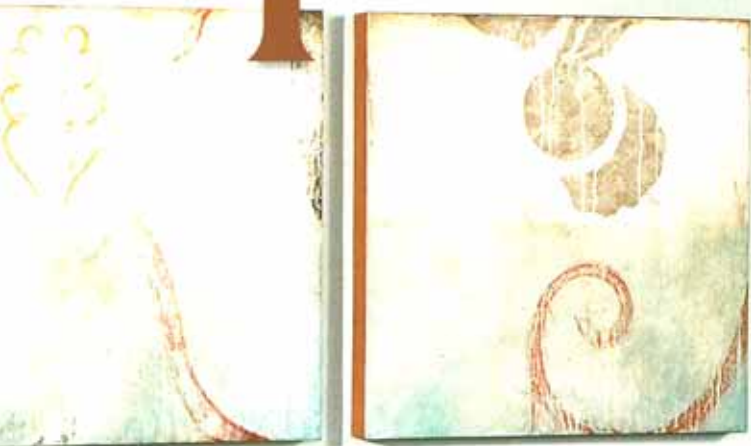


WASHINGTON

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David H. Mitchell creates a serene mood in a Chevy Chase apartment. Custom sofa by Mitchell, paintings above it by Joseph Haske, coffee table by Salvations, vintage chair, sculpture by John Safer. Photograph by Morgan Howarth.

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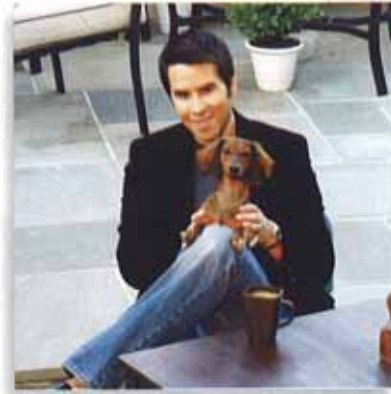
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Photograph courtesy of Roche Bobois

CLOSE TO HOME

BETHESDA NATIVES KEVIN AND KARA SHEEHAN BELIEVE LESS IS BETTER IN THEIR CAPE COD CONVERSION

WRITTEN BY **SHERRY MOELLER**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ANNE GUMMERSON**

Kevin and Kara Sheehan are not new to the Bethesda home market. They grew up in this town, attended its schools, and most recently completed the conversion of a Cape Cod into a modern day contemporary. But it wasn't without a bit, albeit minimal, of kicking and screaming.

"I told Kara, 'I don't want to walk into the house and see a silver bowl with a green pear in it and nothing else,'" Kevin says.

"Kevin told me he didn't want to live in The Brady Bunch's house either," Kara says, recalling the contemporary designs of the 1970s. But as a Realtor with W.C. & A.N. Miller Company who sees and admires the modern architecture of local talents, such as David Jameson, Mark McInturff, and Robert Gurney, Kara knew that a Cape Cod, more so than a colonial or split-level, had the potential to be the perfect family home with the clean lines, open flow, and warmth that she wanted, complete with modern finishes.

Kevin was skeptical, but relied on Kara's expertise in the real estate market, her background in interior design, and her three-ring binder filled with a collection of home design photographs she's been collecting for eight years. It's her design bible. He's now a believer.





Recently completed, the Sheehans' former Cape Cod now resembles a Midwestern contemporary with its stucco exterior, cable wire railings, Ipe decking, and single post portico. "It's a surprise when you round the bend on the street," says Architect Michael Bruckwick, who infused his modern design sensibilities during the renovation process.

OPPOSITE FAR LEFT: Before, Kara Sheehan could envision this traditional 1959 Cape Cod being converted into a contemporary home.

OPPOSITE LEFT: During construction, neighbors and friends couldn't imagine what the completed home would look like until Robey Inc. added the stucco finish that tied the new construction with the old.



In search of formal attire for an upcoming event, Kara stopped in her tracks when she saw the John Lennon portrait in Z Gallerie in Tysons Corner. A Beatles fan, Kara bought the portrait instead of a new outfit. The painting now has a prominent place in the mudroom that features a spiral staircase from The Iron Shop.

OPPOSITE: Clockwise from left: Corbin, 10, Kara, 42, Kevin, 42, Casey, 12, and Ryan, 7, gather in the mudroom that serves as a secondary entryway. The family pet, Sailor, is stretched out on the tiled floor. Kara and Kevin Sheehan like this room's spiral staircase for its function; their three sons like it for its novelty. Another spiral stairway is outside leading from the main floor deck to the backyard.

Mudroom walls
Benjamin Moore
Carrington Beige
HC-93*

Imagine

Around a bend at the highest point in Bethesda, past brick center hall colonials, traditional Cape Cods, and sprawling split-levels, is the Sheehans' modern marvel. For Kara and Kevin, this home was going to be "a stepping stone" to their permanent residence. But after living in it, they realized just how comfortable and livable it was for them and their children. "I see it as a long-term home now," Kara says. "I can't imagine wanting anything more."

Kara wanted to move from her last home so when this Cape Cod came on the market on a Bethesda street she had long admired for its sunrises, sunsets, and winter views of the Potomac River, she jumped on it. Knowing that a Cape Cod-style home would be easier to convert to a contemporary than a colonial or split-level, she still wasn't sure at first how much renovating they would want or need to do.

Kevin, who co-hosts radio shows on Triple X ESPN Radio including pre- and post-game Redskins broadcasts, thought, "Why don't we throw some paint on it and redo some things like the kitchen and baths." But as Kara and her architect, Michael Bruckwick, partner with John Katinas of Katinas Bruckwick Architecture, began to peruse Kara's three-ring binder, they saw a theme – a theme that would require more than paint and minimal updates.

Kara didn't realize just how contemporary her tastes were until she looked at her collected photographs. Bruckwick, who lived in Chicago and is knowledgeable about the Midwest's modern designs, agreed. "We love all sorts of architecture," at the firm, Bruckwick says, but they consider the family first and if they can live in a certain home style. For Kara, she kept going back to modern designs touched with warmth, such as home styles prevalent in the Midwest, Bruckwick says.



Photograph by Stacy Zarin-Goldberg

Let It Be

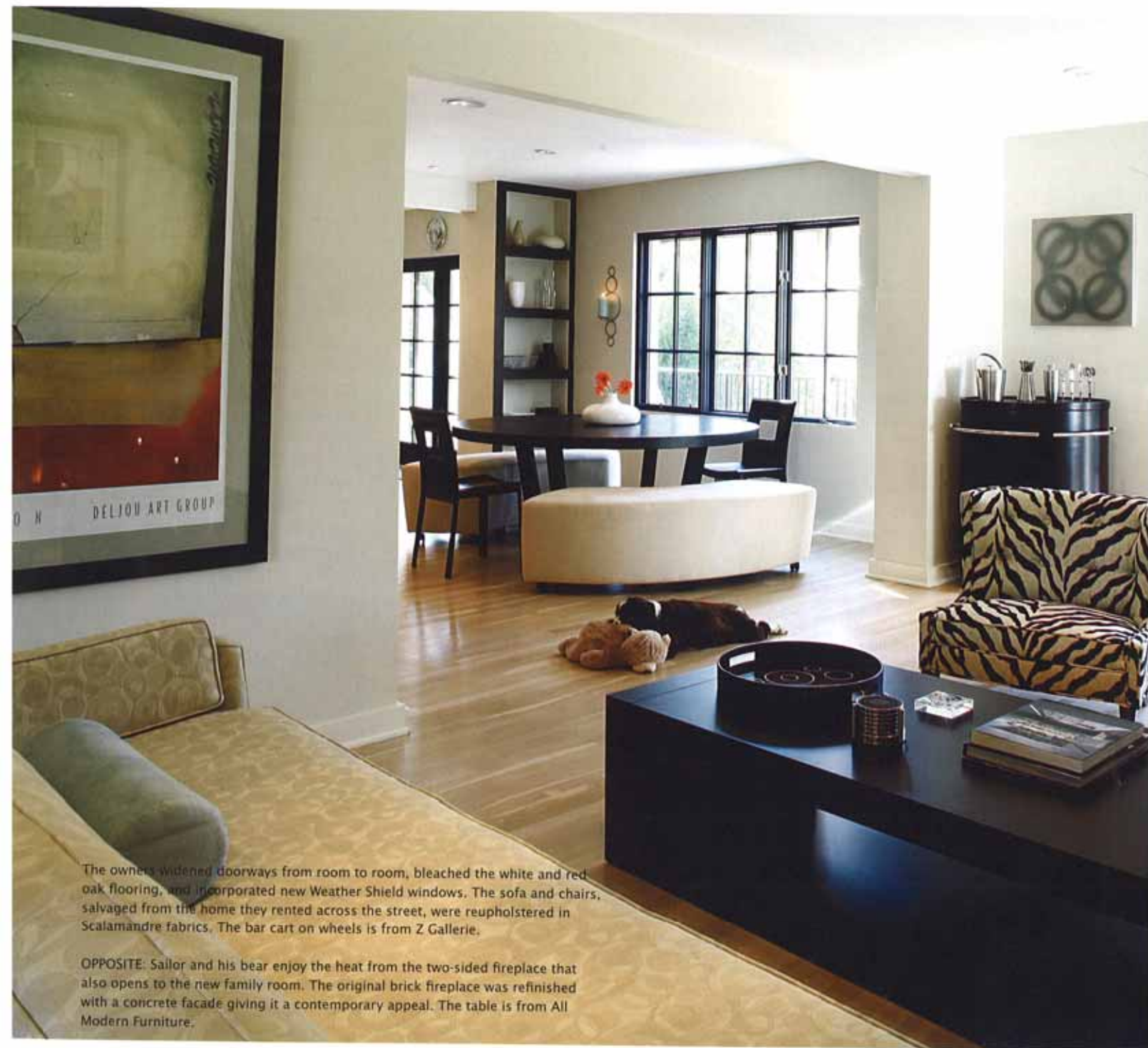
"I had no intention of doing such a major renovation," Kara says. "If I had deeper pockets at the time, I might have torn it down and done things differently," she adds. "But in retrospect, I think what we thought were limitations initially turned out to be positives in the overall scheme of things." Specifically, they had to work around what was there, such as 8' ceilings, a chimney in the center of the home, and the location of the waste pipes. The first floor bedroom and bathroom became an office and powder room, while other rooms were opened up to one another. The chimney was converted into a two-sided gas fireplace that warms both the living room and the new family

room. In addition to closet space, Kevin requested this two-way fireplace.

For Kara, since the laundry room was on the lower level, a second floor laundry chute was paramount, but a little tricky to devise. The only location where it worked was in the owners' closet with clothes passing through a PVC pipe to the lower level.

"There isn't a lot of wasted space in the house," Kara says. The result is a home that's cozy and inviting – livable. "Even if there is a stark element to the design, if you add natural elements inside, they make it more comfortable," Kara says. Punches of color and texture make it homey.

Because of county zoning restrictions and the house's size, which is approximately 5,000 square feet on three levels, they struggled with getting four bedrooms out of the three existing rooms upstairs. Adding a two-story side structure, where the first floor screened porch once was, created a mudroom with an alternate main level entry for the boys, Casey, Corbin, and Ryan, as well as a bedroom upstairs. "I was insistent on the spiral staircase for two reasons," Kara says, because as a secondary entrance, it took the heat off the main foyer and structurally, it's artistic and pleasing to the eye. "It's my boys' favorite space."



The owners widened doorways from room to room, bleached the white and red oak flooring, and incorporated new Weather Shield windows. The sofa and chairs, salvaged from the home they rented across the street, were reupholstered in Scalamanre fabrics. The bar cart on wheels is from Z Gallerie.

OPPOSITE: Sailor and his bear enjoy the heat from the two-sided fireplace that also opens to the new family room. The original brick fireplace was refinished with a concrete facade giving it a contemporary appeal. The table is from All Modern Furniture.

Follow the Sun

Because Kara was the general contractor on the project and they had sold their home only blocks away, they decided to rent a home across the street from their new residence. This not only allowed Kara to keep a close eye on construction, but also got their sons involved in the process along the way. "Day to day, they couldn't wait to see what had been done," Kara says. And Corbin would sit for hours and draw plans for the second level. "That's why I gave him the best bedroom upstairs," Kara adds.

The windows were one of the first things to change. "I wanted to have as much glass as possible to let as much light in as I could," Kara says, allowing them to take advantage of the

home's views from its high point on the hill. But probably one of the biggest concerns, at least for Kevin, was envisioning how the side addition was going to actually tie into the rest of the spaces, especially with its flat roof. But he trusted Kara's ability to make this renovated home look better than its original counterpart, just as she had done in previous homes.

A Day in the Life

All of Bruckwick's and the Sheehans' ideas were incorporated by Ken Abel, owner of Abel Carpentry. "Kenny and I have worked together since I bought my first home when I was 27 years old," Kara says. "It was a natural fit." Abel is a



Living and dining room walls
Benjamin Moore
Creamy White
OC-7*

perfectionist, Kara says. For example, he spent days building the portico above the entryway only to tear it down because all parties involved weren't happy with the way it blocked the dormer above it. Moving it down inches made all the difference.

For the portico's design, Bruckwick insisted that the steel overhang be supported by a single post with a "flying corner" to enforce the home's Midwestern styling. To prove its sturdiness and his faith in what Abel, Howard Rosenberg of HJR Structural Engineers, and he designed, Bruckwick stood and even jumped up and down on the cantilevered corner of the steel portico when the temporary post was removed. It was secure and enhanced the exterior's strong frame.

Inside, Kara's desire to incorporate raw steel above the

entryway, which is an extension of the outside portico, was hindered by the fact that electricity couldn't be installed in the hollow structure. She ended up dry walling the entry overhang and wrapping it in stainless steel in order to incorporate recessed lights.


"The best part for me," Kara says, "has been seeing the house come to life – taking an ugly duckling and making it into something special ... and Michael has been invaluable. I knew what I wanted in terms of finishes, but I totally relied on Michael when it came to actual drawings and recommendations." If Kara renovates a home again, she says she'll be more cost conscious and consider other products, such as wood instead of steel over the entryway.



Every Little Thing

Kara and Kevin both love the new kitchen. "We spend more time there than anywhere else," Kevin says. It's large and formal enough for dinner parties, as well as comfortable for use on a daily basis.

Fabricated by AK Metal Fabricators Inc., the stainless steel counters complement the Omega Cabinets from The Great Indoors. The adjoining dining room includes twin built-ins along the outside walls, Dellarobbia table and benches, and All Modern Furniture leather chairs. Kara incorporated circular elements, such as the wood painting from Z Gallerie above the West Elm side cabinet, to soften the sharp edges of the interior finishes.



Kitchen walls
Benjamin Moore
Manchester Tan
HC-81*



That Means a Lot

"The house is easy to live in," Kevin says. "No clutter." Their three sons are learning less is better as well. For example, they didn't request many holiday gifts so they wouldn't "junk up" the house. The family likes the orderliness and neatness of the home now.

Friends of the Sheehans have said, "This looks like your home," Kara says. Once the stucco went on the exterior and the true vision of the home was realized, all comments from neighbors and friends were positive.

But the ultimate accolade came from Kevin, Kara says, when one day before leaving for work he said, "I really like our house."

"That was the nicest compliment of all," Kara says.



Upper level bathroom walls

Benjamin Moore
Abingdon Putty
HC-99*



Powder room walls

Benjamin Moore
Jupiter Glow
021-48*

ABOVE LEFT: One of the boys' favorite elements, their bathroom's hand dryer, is visible in the mirror to the left. Vanities are from europeanbathrooms.com.

ABOVE RIGHT: Using more calming tones throughout the house, Kara went for bold in the first floor powder room with a bright wall color and a vanity from EXPO Design Center.



ABOVE LEFT: A circular newel post and black wrought iron railings round out the changes in the main stairway where an Ellsworth Kelly poster hangs at the top of the staircase. Kara found some of the home's artwork online and had it framed.

ABOVE RIGHT: The stainless steel-wrapped foyer overhang is most dramatic at night. A transom and double glass doors bring the outside in. **ws**

RESOURCES

- **Abel Carpentry**
301.379.4435
- **AK Metal Fabricators Inc.**
703.823.1661
akmetalfab.com
- **All Modern Furniture**
800.331.7445
allmodernfurniture.com
- **CB2**
800.606.6252
cb2.com
- **Dellarobbia**
951.372.9199
dellarobbiausa.com
- **European Bathrooms**
europeanbathrooms.com
- **Eurway Furniture**
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eurway.com
- **EXPO Design Center**
301.767.3400
expo.com
- **HJR Structural Engineers**
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- **Katinas Bruckwick Architecture**
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kbarchitecture.com
- **Pete Stepp Enterprises**
301.474.8856
- **Quality Window & Door Inc.**
800.595.9991
qualitywindowanddoorinc.com
- **ReeDee Concrete Corp.**
301.942.6888
reedeeconcrete.com
- **Robey Inc.**
410.751.7788
robeystucco.com
- **Smith + Noble**
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- **The Great Indoors**
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thegreatindoors.com
- **The Iron Shop**
800.523.7427
theironshop.com
- **West Elm**
571.633.0227
westelm.com
- **Z Gallerie**
703.506.8602
zgallerie.com

*Colors shown may not be exact. Visit benjaminmoore.com for more information.