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**A SHOWCASE FOR CREATIVE LIVING
IN THE DELAWARE VALLEY**



Where Architecture Follows Function

Living in a space means that it should be designed for just that—to live in!

by Troy Putt-Baker
photos/Bruce Buck

When New York City interior designer Irwin Weiner and his partner, Jay Johnson, operations manager of Design2share.com, were looking for a country home, they wanted to be within two hours of the city. They were considering the Hamptons and upstate New York until friends invited them for a weekend in Bucks County. "After seeing our first covered bridge," says Irwin, "we fell in love with this area." Though they didn't have a particular style of house in mind, Irwin knew the kind of



setting he wanted—not in the woods exactly, but there had to be trees. He wanted some privacy, and he also wanted a sense of neighborhood.

On a September weekend in 2002 they made an appointment with a realtor. Just above the village of Point Pleasant, PA, Irwin found the location he had visualized. As the realtor pulled into the driveway Irwin said to Jay,

Homeowners Irwin Weiner (seated) and Jay Johnson
Photo/Glenn Race

"This is the house I want to buy." The lot, 1 3/4 acres bordered by Hickory Run Creek in the back, included tall shade trees, a 1900s frame farmhouse with an enclosed porch, and several outbuildings. When standing in the center of the property, Irwin could see neighboring homes. It was perfect.

Upon further inspection Irwin knew he would make changes to the house. He soon hired local contractor Jay Maxwell to handle the construction. They rebuilt the porch, replaced some windows, added new siding and updated the utilities. "Old houses are often close to the road. The house had been fully clad with aluminum siding, and the original front porch was enclosed. In addition to my allergic response to the whole McMansion thing," confides Irwin, "I wanted the house to appear to be farther back from the road and closer to its original scale. Eliminating the windows from the porch set the house back the depth of the porch, and breaking up the exterior finishes

using siding and stucco reduced the overall scale of the building.

The dining room was obviously an addition, and Irwin wanted it to appear as such. The exterior of the dining room was covered with a rough stucco finish. The chimney on the opposite side of the house was treated with the same stucco. These two architectural features serve as bookends or parentheses of the house, adding a sense of integrity while further reducing the scale of the house. The concept is to create the impression that the dining room is the original structure and the rest of the house was added later. The two-over-two windows (a 19th century feature) in the dining room and the one-over-one windows in the rest of

The living room firelace was rebuilt, moving the chimney outside. Irwin designed the mantel made of Indiana limestone. Open doors lead to a patio with pergola.



the house reinforce this concept. "These changes had nothing to do with the interior," continues Irwin. "The exterior relates to the neighborhood, but the interior relates to our lifestyle. I feel strongly that living in a space requires that it be designed for just that—to live in."

Accommodating the Furniture

"Architects would not be happy to hear me say that form follows decorating," Irwin exclaims, "but so be it!" In two areas he tweaked the architecture so that he could use particular pieces of furniture. In the living room, for example, Irwin moved the window three feet away from the dining room wall so that he could center the sofa beneath the window and allow for the placement of a pair of chairs. "Having the sofa off-center beneath the window would have been a disaster," he says.

He had the fireplace rebuilt, placing the interior chimney outside, and he designed a mantel carved of Indiana limestone. He replaced the original floor with wide-plank



Living room windows were moved three feet to accommodate sofa and chairs. The contemporary painting was purchased at auction for \$200.



Display shelving in the formal dining room allows space for favorite collections such as the reticulated porcelain compotes. The room is delightful for formal or casual entertaining.

white oak flooring. It was then wire-brushed to give it an antique country look. The walls and ceiling were treated with a standard scratch coat. Then, using a trowel, the plasterer applied a single, untinted skim coat. After the material had dried, several coats of wax were applied.

Focal points in the living room include a large oil painting purchased at an auction at the Eagle Firehouse in New Hope for \$200. Near the front door is a console designed by Irwin and built by Ray Mathis, a blacksmith in Point Pleasant. Above it hangs a photograph Irwin purchased from a New York gallery. Abstract, yet representing a San Francisco construction site, the photograph complements other works of contemporary art in the room.

The dining room is one step down from the living room. Instead of crown molding, Irwin placed standard window molding flat on the ceiling to make the walls appear



taller and to add a sense of drama to the room. A fireplace was removed and replaced by a wall of built-in shelving that provides room to display objets d'art such as his collection of reticulated porcelain compotes. The lacquered French Art Deco chest against the opposite wall shows a Chinese scene of people drinking in a vineyard and is



used as a liquor cabinet. The flooring is travertine noce tiles set in a pattern based on the sidewalks of Paris. A comfortable couch piled with plush pillows provides seating on one side of the rectangular oak dining table; soft Roman shades extend the height of the windows and add a formal look to the room.

A separate wing of the house, added in the 1930s and updated in the 1950s, contains an eat-in country kitchen designed in a U shape. It has ample cabinets and abundant counter space and leads to a checkered-brick patio with a pergola. The west-facing patio catches evening sunsets, providing dramatic backdrops for alfresco cocktail parties and dinners.

Designing with a Sense of Whimsy

On the second floor there are two bedrooms plus an office. The cozy guest bedroom features framed signage purchased from the eclectic design shop America, in Lambertville, NJ. In the spacious master bedroom, which was formerly two small

Fixtures in the master bath were designed by Philippe Starck. The spacious master bedroom was once two small rooms. The fireplace was moved to accommodate the owners' favorite loveseat.



Whimsical signage, purchased from "America" in Lambertville, N.J., decorates the cozy guest room.

rooms, Irwin raised the ceiling, replaced the flooring with medium-width white oak planks, and located a fireplace slightly off-center in the room. The fireplace was moved to accommodate a favorite loveseat purchased at a Brown Brothers auction for \$10. Beneath the loveseat's gingham slipcover he discovered printed velvet upholstery from the 1970s that was perfectly intact. Irwin also designed the fireplace's limestone mantel. The carpet is sisal and has a damask pattern. A painting that depicts a few bars of the words and music of "Twinkle, twinkle little star" hangs above the bed; however, friends who read music tell Irwin the notes are not the music widely recognized as "Twinkle, twinkle."

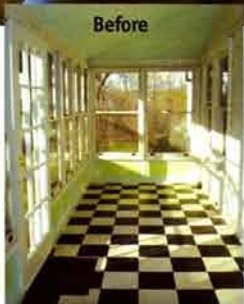
Irwin wanted a master bath without tile, so he painted the walls and chose sleek modern porcelain fixtures by French designer Philippe Starck. He designed a sloping ceiling that rises to the rafters and installed a soaking tub that's a contemporary version of an old-fashioned slipper tub. The general effect

The spacious country kitchen occupies a 1930s addition to the house. A side door leads to the patio and gardens. Photo/Glenn Race

is almost that of a sitting room.

When Irwin and Jay bought the property, the house was surrounded by more than an acre of lawn. It was a lot to mow, and it lacked interest. Jay worked with landscape





Outdoor spaces such as the welcoming front porch are really additional rooms for relaxing or entertaining. Opening the formerly enclosed porch gives the appearance that the house sits a bit farther back from the road.

architect Derick Sutphin to develop a master plan that involved minimizing the size of the lawn.

To bring the plan to life, more than a hundred trees and shrubs and a wide variety of perennials were purchased from Bruce Gangawer of Paxson Hill Farm. Specimen trees like star dogwoods, thundercloud plums and magnolias share the space with evergreens and deciduous trees. Untrimmed privets, crape myrtle and ornamental grasses provide a sense of permanence, while flowering plants ranging from roses and purple coneflowers to lily turf, dinner plate hibiscus and Joe pye weed add blooming interest. For privacy, they installed a screen of yellow groove and nuda bamboo. Deer fencing protects all the delicacies.

“Great garden designs, like the one Derick created for us,” says Jay, “are all

about forming outdoor ‘rooms,’ and we have two of them within the wild-growing perennial beds.” One is Irwin’s secret garden featuring a stone cow and two antique English garden gnomes. “I’m a designer with bad taste,” Irwin jokes. But in fact he loves whimsy and has incorporated a sense of humor both indoors and out. Jay’s secret garden has stepping stones that lead to a French-style, cream-colored gravel patio where he has created seating next to aromatic lavender, Russian sage, lemon mound spireas and boxwoods. For architectural interest he plans to add an antique ironwork gazebo someday.

In addition to the patio with pergola, outdoor entertaining areas include a fireplace and barbecue, a swimming pool “shaped like an Absolut vodka bottle,” says Irwin, and a secluded summerhouse overlooking the creek. Screened and lit by lanterns holding candles, the summerhouse has comfortable lounge furniture and a spectacular view

of Hickory Run Creek, which is lined with large boulders. A quiet refuge, the hideaway is usable during three seasons of the year.

A small studio above the garden shed is used as an extra guest room. “My nieces love it,” Irwin says. Within the garage is a cabana that contains a small bar for preparing cold drinks and poolside snacks as well as a changing room for users of the pool. Colorful embroidered umbrellas located beside the pool were purchased in India.



The summer house, screened on all four sides, overlooks Hickory Run Creek. Built-in lounges provide a comfortable place for reading or napping. See interior below. Photo/Glenn Race.

“Though we come here to relax,” says Irwin, “we love to entertain as well. Our families visit occasionally and stay overnight. A couple of times a year we have parties for forty or fifty neighbors and friends. We call a caterer and leave the work in their competent hands so we can enjoy our guests. We also like to entertain small groups for casual dinners, but we are equal-

ly fond of formal entertaining when the mood strikes. We are so pleased with the neighborhood. There are some very old families in the village, and people are very sociable here.

Community plus privacy, along with beauty, comfort and livability—Irwin and Jay have managed to fulfill all the visions they had for their country home. ♥

