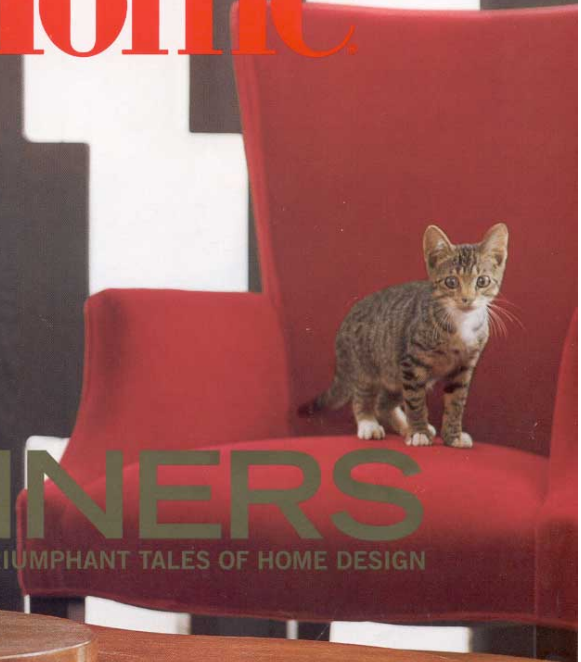


Metropolitan Home

WARMING TRENDS:
MIAMI HEAT
SEXY IN THE CITY

COME-HITHER COLOR



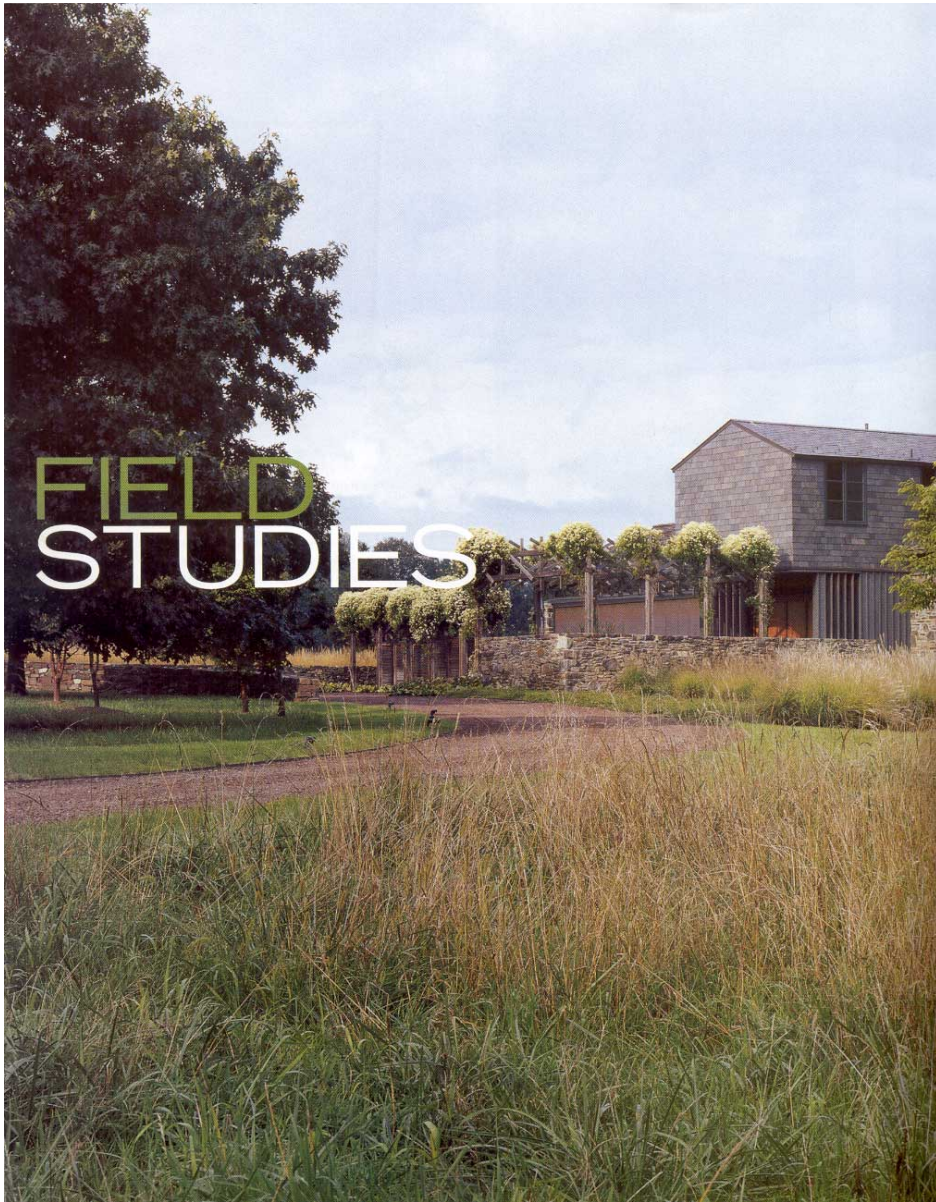
WINNERS

10 READERS TELL TRIUMPHANT TALES OF HOME DESIGN

JANUARY/
FEBRUARY 2001
USA \$3.50
CANADA \$4.50
UK £2.75
Display until
February 5, 2001
www.methome.com



METROPOLITAN HOME 1981 2001
TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY



FIELD STUDIES



ARCHITECT MICHAEL RYAN DESIGNED THIS CONTEMPORARY HOUSE FOR A CONTEMPORARY ART COLLECTING COUPLE THAT SAMPLES FROM THE HISTORIC COUNTRYSIDE VERNACULAR.

IN the beginning, Helene and Allen Apter were so sure they wanted to live in rural Pennsylvania that converting an old barn into a new house seemed both appealing and logical. They even found one they thought was perfect for conversion. But their architect, Michael Ryan (who had already done a beach house for the couple on the south New Jersey shore), was not as enthusiastic. While he was inspecting the building the Apters had selected, Ryan had what he calls a revelation: "People shouldn't be living in barns," he recalls saying to them. "Barns are barns." They agreed and revised their strategy: They would build a new home inspired by the regional farm vernacular.

The Apters, with grown children but an ever-growing, prodigious collection of modern art, wanted a larger house, but one that seemed to "belong to the land and that drew upon the tradition of old agricultural buildings," says Ryan. He wanted to evoke an all-American barn but also to elicit the notion of a residence fitted into something that had already existed. His final plan consisted of three contiguous, barn-inspired "wings," each housing its own function: public living/dining spaces; garage and service areas; and bedrooms.

The plan called for traditional materials and the replication of patterns found on aging neighboring buildings. In fact, the Apters drove all over Pennsylvania looking at two- and three-hundred-year-old stonework. "We were searching for a certain color," recalls Helene, "and a lack of uniformity." They found a 70-something stone mason, who had been practicing his craft since his boyhood in Italy, to work vintage magic on their new home.

The three barnlike "wings" of the house come into view along a crushed redstone driveway. Landscape architect Lisa Roth used fountain grass, flame grass and leather reed grass to re-create a natural meadow.

PRODUCED BY LINDA O'KEEFE. PHOTOGRAPHS BY CATHERINE BOGERT. WRITTEN BY DAVID MASELLO.



Even after their children left home, the Apters were far from empty-nesters. Their expanding art collection includes Sean Scully paintings, Alex Katz portraits, even a Red Grooms sculpture (they call it “Happily Ever Apter”). To maximize wall space, especially in the vaulted living/dining area, Ryan set fixed clerestory windows high along the ceiling line. These expanses of glass are separated by vertical mullions, which, according to Ryan, “connote the feel of an industrial space while also evoking barn boards.”

“The criteria for both the furnishings and the art we collect is that they be simple and clean,” says Helene, who has kept the large 45-foot-long living room remarkably uncluttered. “Relaxing is not part of my personality,” she says. “Allen and I don’t sit still, but the artwork and furnishings relax us.” Indeed, many of the furnishings, designed by Michael Ryan Architects or bought by Ryan’s wife, Randee Spelkoman, who works as an interior designer in the firm, have the feel of being collected pieces rather than mere furniture.

The fireplace and steel beams act as conspicuous sculptural elements. For Allen, an industrial manufacturer, the idea of having steel beams in his house was initially unsettling. “I look at steel all day at work—I should have to come home and look at it again?” he says, as both statement and rhetorical question. But he and Helene quickly came to admire the exuberant forms. “They outline everything inside,” she says.

Serving as a major focal point of the room is a stainless steel flue, shrouded by a curtain of chain mail. The mail not only evokes a gauzy, ghostly image of a massive chimney, but also diffuses sunshine that spills through a skylight. An entertainment unit rises via remote control from the hearth.

Steel beams that course the living/dining area are structural and aesthetic; they’re finished with linseed oil to prevent rusting. The Apters’ collection includes Robert Mapplethorpe photos in the living room and Robert Longo paintings (above a dining table by Michael Ryan Architects).





The house is defined by textures and patterns. A geometric grid of flooring—composed of black slate from Virginia and bluish-gray and lilac-colored stone from Pennsylvania—is introduced at the spacious entrance foyer and runs throughout much of the house. “The idea was to create a woven pattern,” says Ryan. “The way the stones join helps demarcate the living spaces.” A series of 12 interlocking translucent resin benches, designed by Ryan’s firm, further emphasizes the rectilinear quality of the entryway. Although a consistent neutral hue, the benches appear multicolored as they absorb any and all adjacent colors.

Ceiling beams, freestanding screens and decorative rugs also help define individual spaces. Off the open-plan kitchen, a custom-made hooked rug, its vibrant play of circles a foil to the rigorous rectangles of the floors and kitchen countertops, establishes the boundaries of a spacious breakfast room. Ryan

designed a six-foot-high screen of painted fiberboard panels to separate the table from a hallway to the master bedroom.

Beyond the kitchen is an intimate seating area with a television, a place in the house where the Apters spend most of their leisure time. The loose grid of wood beams that hangs there solves the technical problem of trying to light a small space with a high sloping ceiling: Rather than recessing the lighting, Ryan installed pinpoint lights on the beams. The pinpoints are softer and allow for more precise and specific focus. And in an effort to define the room as a kind of interior “porch,” the architect arranged the beams to resemble a trellis—like the one at the outside entrance.

The entrance foyer (opposite) is a study in minimalism: Sean Scully’s “Yellow Place” hangs above custom-designed resin seating blocks. As is clear from the view from kitchen, the rooms of the house are not all set at right angles; most windows are uncovered.



The house as a whole functions as a series of private domains. The master bedroom (top) is situated in a separate first-floor wing; the two guest bedrooms are above the main public space. His and her bathrooms stand on opposite sides of the master bedroom, where draperylike panels cover the wall behind the bed.

Even the entrance to the house acts as a separate, albeit outdoor, room: For much of the late summer and early fall, sweet clematis blooms within the trellis grid, making for a fragrant roof. Other boundary-defining elements of the outdoor entrance include a pond stocked with a school of orange and white koi, its submerged planter grown tall with wild grasses; a low-lying stone retaining wall; imposing entry doors and a windowless wall clad in slate tiles. "My decision to have no windows on that wall, to keep it blank," explains Ryan, "was about providing a kind of monumentality and scale the rest of the house demanded. And I liked the slate because it worked so well with the stone of the house."

Perhaps because the owners continue to add to their art collection and to commission furnishings, they consider the house not yet complete. "Michael's houses evolve," says Helene. "They grow and change and each room remains distinct." Ryan thinks of the beach houses he has designed as "much more temporal" than places he has built inland. "This house has a sense of permanence I like," he says. "It's a house that reaches back in time, but also reaches forward. The implication of the house, I think, is that it could have another use a hundred years from now"—not unlike the old barns that still stand in neighboring fields. mh

See Resources, last pages.

The front entrance (opposite) functions much like a room, albeit an outdoor one. Draperylike panels in the master bedroom (top) serve to soften the room acoustically and visually. Helene Apter's limestone and white-oak bathroom (left) features a shower lit by a skylight.

