

“Reconciling the natural, seemingly rural setting with the *urban sensibilities* of the new owners created the kind of challenge I enjoy. Resolving the *tension between different aesthetics* gives a space an unpretentious interest and depth.” —Betsy Brown



The massive front door, constructed of horizontal white oak planks and hardware with an industrial look, might seem out of place in any other setting, but here it finds the perfect placement. Instead of hanging from traditional hinges, the door pivots from the center for a surprising but utilitarian element. Ample built-in shelving, lined with aged white oak planks, offers sleek display space for the homeowners' book collection.

# MODERN REVIVAL

After years of waiting patiently on a quiet wooded lot in Mountain Brook, a 1950s home finds new owners and a design team that appreciated its modern roots.

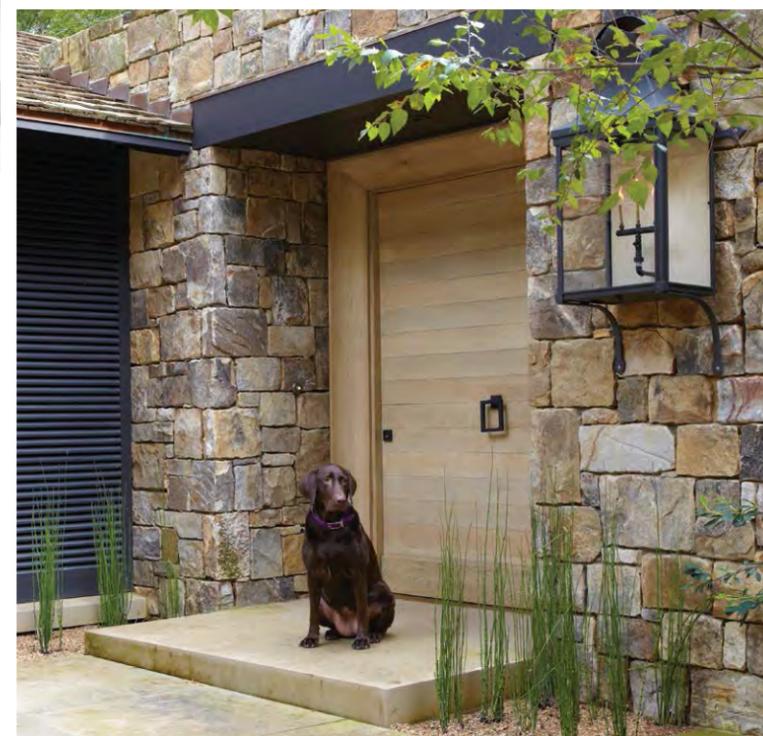
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OPPOSITE PAGE: The 12-foot dining room table, designed by Betsy Brown and built by Michael Morrow of MDM Design Studio, was crafted out of reclaimed white oak. Chrome-plated steel dining room chairs were made in the early '70s by mid-century American designer Milo Baughman. A black-and-white cow-skin rug provides contrasts of color and texture to the smooth polish of the white oak floors. ABOVE: Clean stainless steel surfaces, Italian Carrara marble (from Triton Stone, fabricated by Birmingham Marble Works), and the bleached white oak of the island create a kitchen that is as pleasing to view as to use. The chrome barstools, designed by Harry Bertoia in 1952, and the Brutalist steel rotating wall sculpture provide an edginess that is true to the roots of the new home.



LEFT: For the front courtyard, landscape designer Norman Johnson chose brown Tennessee river gravel for a seamless amorphous effect. Horsetail reef plants will maintain their clean vertical lines to accent the linear aspects of the home. TOP RIGHT: The water feature, a special request from the homeowners, provides tranquil background noise that reinforces the natural elements. ABOVE: The unique staircase, made from white oak timbers, transitions from the open living spaces to the private bedroom downstairs.



**A HOUSE WITH GOOD BONES WILL ALWAYS PASS THE TEST OF TIME.** While this one got a little tattered around the edges and weathered at the seams, the envelope was solid. It just took some homeowners with faith and a design team with vision to give it new life.

Built in the mid 1950s by Birmingham architect Nelson Smith (best known for designing St. Luke's Episcopal Church), the home exhibited lines reminiscent of the modern aesthetic in vogue during that period. As years passed and mid-century modern gave way to suburban McMansions and cottages, the house fell out of style—eventually sitting empty. Still, it had merits: three wooded acres and close proximity to the Mountain Brook villages. Even better, designer Betsy Brown, architects Paul Bates and Jeremy Corkern, and landscape designer Norman Johnson had an itch to team up and revive the home as a fine example of what modern means now.

“The original house was sited beautifully to the property, but it wasn't open to the views,” says Jeremy. By replacing walls with load-bearing supports, the design team aired out the interiors to reveal a bright spacious home consisting of one great space.

The view as you enter through the massive front door poses multiple temptations. Initially the eye is drawn across the

“One of my favorite things about the house is that *we live in all of it*. No area is set aside for one purpose only. Most areas function in multiple ways.” —homeowner

“The huge oak library table is a *changing tableau* for the owner, sometimes holding a progression of vases and candles, and sometimes spread with books, laptops, and cups of tea. Life has changed—we often need *one space to fill many needs*.” —Betsy Brown



From the main level of the house, the striking rendition of Dulcinea, Don Quixote's love interest, painted by Spanish artist Lita Cabellut, can be fully appreciated. A glass wall on the right-hand side of the fireplace provides a barrier to the living room without breaking the visual plane. Comfortable chairs and an ottoman situated adjacent to the dining room table punctuate the multipurpose aspect of the room.

The master bedroom and adjacent lounge are tucked away from the rest of the house. In the bedroom, the soft whites and pale grays of the upholstery and walls create a serene ambiance. The large painting above the fireplace is by local artist Clayton Colvin (Beta Pictoris Gallery). OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM: In the lounge, a dark charcoal mohair custom sofa and leather Eames chair provide the ideal place for indulging in a good read or taking in the view through the expansive window. OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: Natural light reflects off of the hand-waxed fluted vanity and bleached white oak cabinets. A plush reindeer rug softens the clean lines of the dominant elements.



light-filled room and through the full-length glass-and-steel windows and doors that form the opposing wall of the house, and then out into the wooded landscape.

From the kitchen, with the clean lines of its Italian Carrara marble-topped island and custom-built white oak cabinetry, to the elevated living room and adjacent screened porch, each area compels the visitor not only to take a closer look but to stay a while and enjoy the space.

With multipurpose functions as an entry, a dining room, or simply a place to settle down with a cup of coffee and a book, the expansive main room welcomes visitors in with unpretentious warmth. As Betsy Brown explains, “Not a dedicated dining room or entry, the grand expanse of space did present a challenge. The furniture scale needed to be large enough to fill the space and create a dramatic entry but at the same time comfortable enough to entice the family to relax and really live in it.”

The design of the home stayed true to the mantra of its modern lineage: form follows function. From air vents that disappear into their surroundings to custom-designed hardware, lighting, and furniture, each detail was carefully considered. Jeremy and Paul credit the influences of David Adler and French designer Jean-Michel Frank for their devotion to details. Doors that hide ample storage closets seem to seamlessly blend into walls with no break in the strong horizontal lines created by the white oak planks. Functionality and beauty combine in perfect harmony to complement the overall design.

The results speak clearly of multiple creative energies that were skillfully intertwined through the design team. With a nod to its original “modern” roots, the aesthetically-pleasing home embraces the new “modern” ideals of versatility, efficiency, functionality, and comfort.



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