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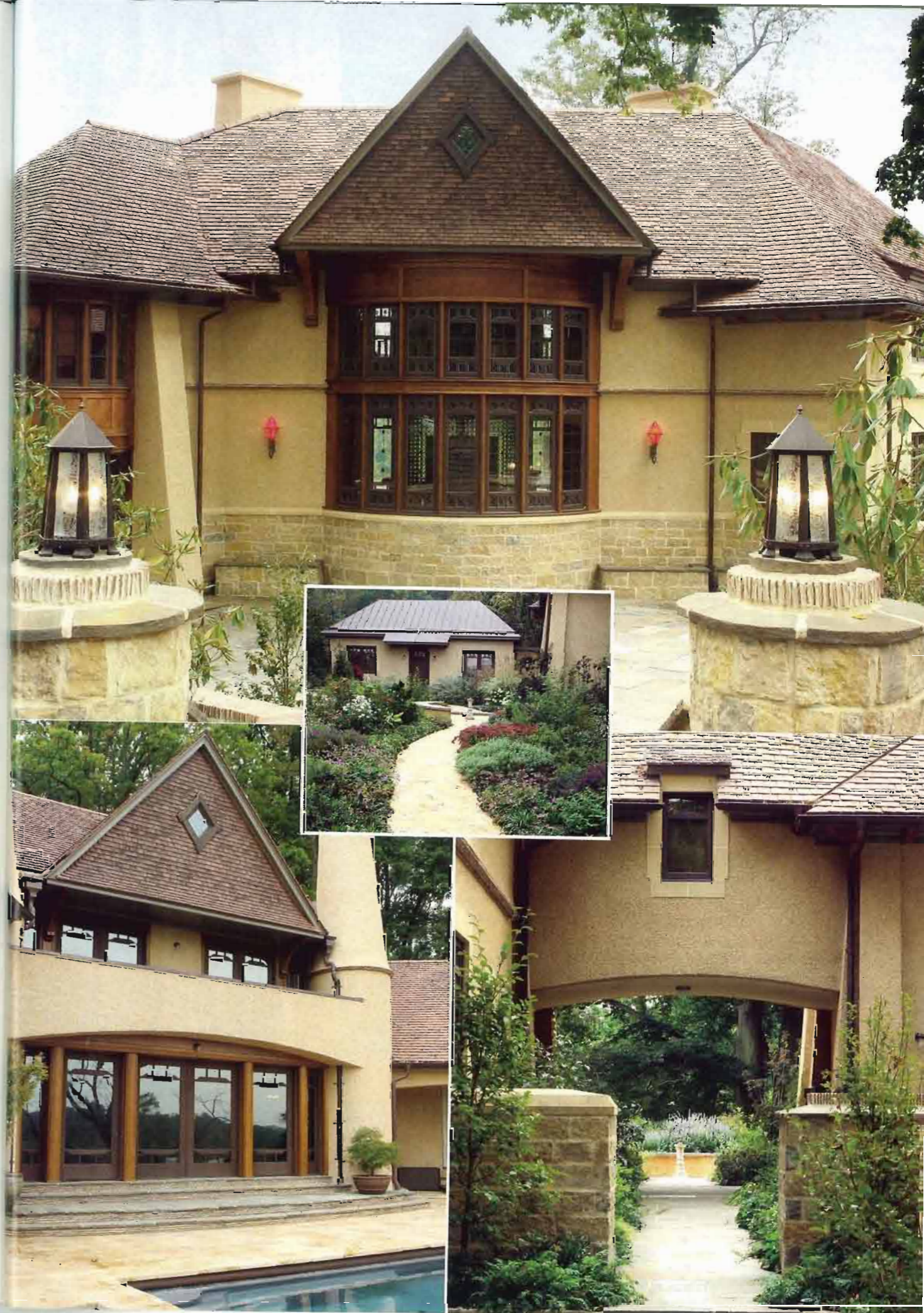
An *Epic* in the Making

A homeowner and an architect design an Arts & Crafts style home to last generations, featuring the natural landscape and talent of local artists and artisans

by Stefanie Claypoole

Peter Archer, AIA, believes it was fate that brought him together with a homeowner in the early twenty-first century. The two encountered each other at a home for sale: Peter was considering purchasing the property for his firm to renovate and the homeowner was interested in relocating his family from their Chester County farmhouse to a home that could potentially house future generations of he and his wife's children. The property they were both investigating turned out not to be the "epic" house of his dreams, so he enlisted the West Chester-based architectural design firm of Archer & Buchanan Architecture, Ltd., to create one. Today that dream is fully realized in Berwyn, where the homeowners, their four daughters and family dog share an approximately ten-thousand-square-foot Arts & Crafts style home nestled amid an idyllic twelve-acre property, which also includes a separate home, especially designed and constructed for the wife's parents.

The house was designed to be viewed as a "sequence of experiences." This view highlights the butterfly plan, a design that takes advantage of the natural light and the view of the property's twelve acres. Peter Archer, the architect and a partner in Archer & Buchanan Architecture, Ltd. Opposite from top, a view of the third "sequence," as seen from the parking lot; and the passage from the second-floor workout room to the in-law cottage and three-car garage.

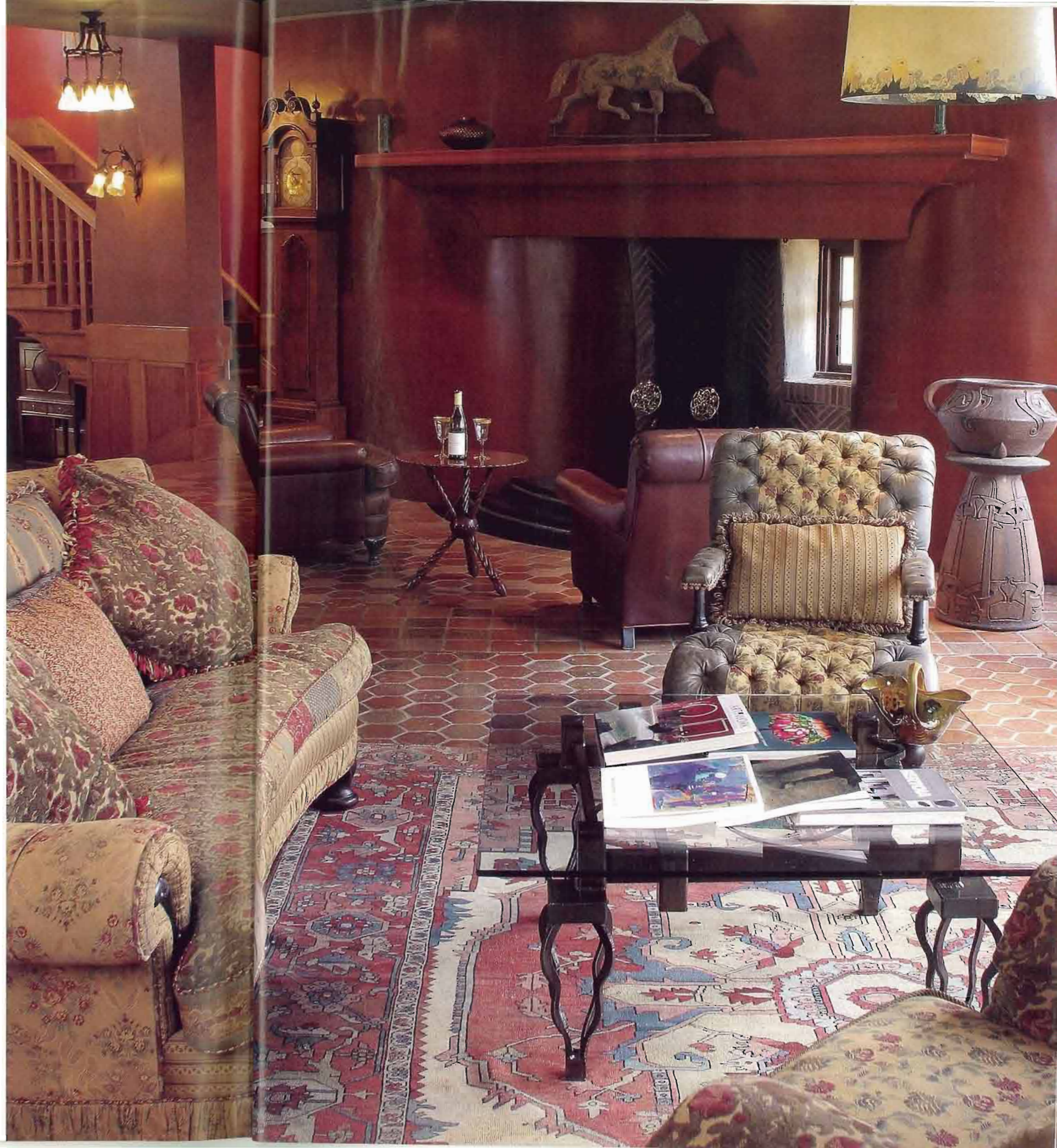


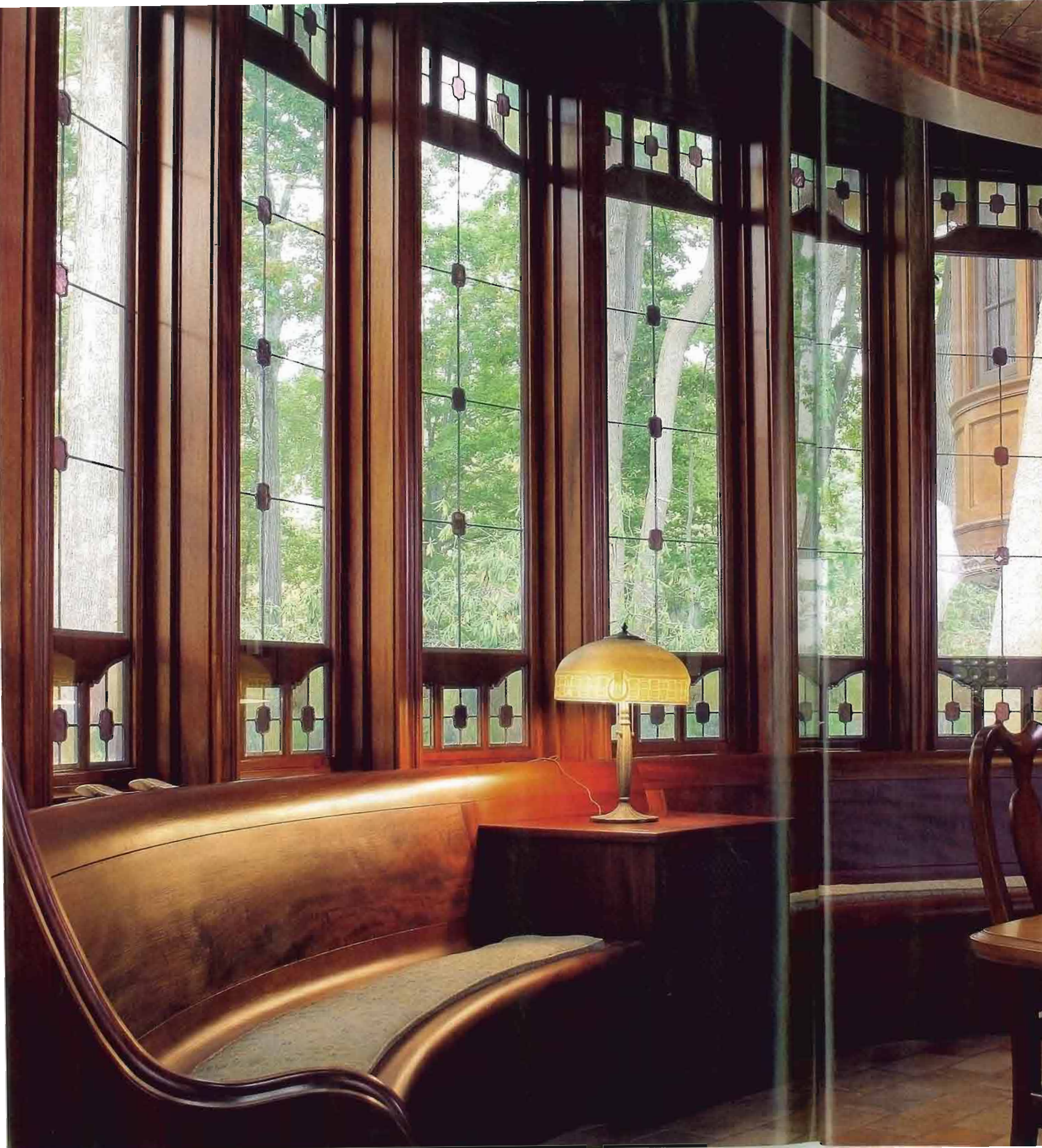


The Berwyn residence doesn't have a moniker like many properties its size. That is perhaps an indication of homeowners' desire for the home to be "epic" but not grandiose. In fact despite its massiveness, inside, the house is intimate, and every space is utilized by the family. Peter believes this is because the home is a true convergence of visions: of architect, of homeowners, of craftspeople and of nature. Peter worked very closely with the homeowners to construct a space that, while intricately detailed, is also extremely family friendly. "A lot of homeowners give me photos of things they like. They handwritten an eight-page letter about how their family lives," Peter recalls. "That gave us freedom so there was nothing we were trying to follow or mimic exactly."

A 1912 home already resided on the property, which is in conservancy. The house, however, was "dilapidated and didn't fit the homeowners' lifestyle," Peter notes. "A good house grows into the land. Like the roots of a tree, it gives it foundation." So the existing home was demolished to make way for a home that truly becomes part of the landscape. Some existing materials, in particular, hardware and an old water barrel, were recycled for the new construction, which began in 2003 and, while "completed" in 2007, remains an ongoing project.

A view of the main stairwell and the glass doors to the master suite. The doors, with an autumnal theme, were custom made by Emily Selvin. The stairs of English quartersawn oak have brass Celtic inlays that match a dressing table in the master suite. The first-floor floors are natural French clay tile and the columns were painted by Nancy Evers and her son Holland to replicate leather. A view of the main living area from the breakfast nook shows the fireplace, painted by Evers and her son, which resembles wood and leather.





One design detail that was very important to the owner was that the home should prescribe to the tenets of the Arts & Crafts Movement. The Arts & Crafts Movement was a British and American aesthetic that occurred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Not necessarily focused on architecture, the movement was somewhat of a rebellion against industrialism and machine-made products, with homage instead to the personal handiwork of craftspeople. Probably the best known practitioners were William Morris, Edwin Lutyens, Frank Lloyd Wright, Gustav Stickley, Greene & Greene and Charles Voysey, all of whom Peter and the homeowners drew inspiration from during planning. “We decided to tie our passions together and put them in a more indigenous Pennsylvania setting,” Peter says. The Arts & Crafts movement dissipated after WWII due to the poor economy, but that interest has resurged over the past decade, as training in specialized crafts has grown along with passion for hand-hewn designs.

“We designed the home so that there would be three distinct views of it, a sequence of experiences if you will,” Peter says. The first “experience” occurs immediately as you turn



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The dramatic double-story bay windows in the dining room was designed to match that of the Vesper Boat Club in Philadelphia and features built-in mahogany bench seating, a cork ceiling in a herringbone pattern and glass windows designed by Joel Bless of Glasslight; the first-floor kitchen, while contemporary in function, features cabinetry of quartersawn English oak with glass detailing by Emily Selvin, granite countertops and ceramic tile; this Art Nouveau-inspired piece shows off fine diningware during the day and can be turned as desired to expose a liquor cabinet.

An Epic in the Making

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from the road into the driveway. The home was designed not to sit formally on the plateau, but instead fit into the natural dips and curves of the setting; it almost rolls down the hillside in a butterfly plan with stepped-roof levels. The façade is entirely tan and brown, so the home doesn't shout "look at me" but instead sort of whispers "come closer and see my magnificent artistry." Three-quarters of the way up the winding drive is your second "experience" of the home, where you can view its angles through the mature trees that dot the property. Finally, at the north end of the property, you come to the "back" of the home, which is actually the formal entrance. Parking has been designed above the home, so that you are walking down to it slowly. This was by design also. While you could drive right up to the home via the entrance court, the intent is to make you park in the area north of it and walk down to meet it.

Peter says the exterior of the home was inspired by British Arts & Crafts purveyors Edwin Lutyens and M.H. Baillie Scott, and Americans Greene & Greene. The exterior is composed of a sixteen-inch concrete foundation, two by six framing, eight inches of concrete block and finally, one and a half inches of concrete pebble-dash stucco. In the entrance court your first close glimpse of the craftsmanship that went into the home is immediately evident. There are limestone window surrounds from Kasota, Minnesota, quartersawn oak brackets and window trim designed and fabricated by local woodworker David Dougan. The windows and doors are two-and-a-half-inch thick mahogany with copper exteriors, and many of the windows are constructed from leaded art glass. The roof is English clay tile from Ontario. Leftover pieces were built into various stair risers on the home's exterior. The gardens surrounding the home were designed by Anna Anisko, whom the homeowners chose because of her intimate knowledge of native Pennsylvania plantings.

Immediately in front of you is the dining room, which features two-story

gable windows made to mimic Vesper Boat Club on Boathouse Row. To the right is an eighteen-square-foot in-law cottage, which resides above and behind one of two three-car garages. To the left of the dining room windows is what Peter refers to as "the lantern," where the stairwell to the second floor pauses so you can look out the windows to the beauty of the northern side of the property. Inside, there is a gorgeous brass arm chandelier that beams light out at night, a sound sculpture and a gold-leafed hand-painted dome. Below the "lantern" is the front door to the home, which is the first instance of stained-art glass of many you will find inside. The glass features a river scene designed by local artisan Emily Selvin and was inspired by the Gamble house by Greene & Greene. Light fixtures on the exterior were designed to look like torches and flowers.

Once inside you almost don't know what to take in first: the gorgeous natural French clay tiled floor; the hand-hewn hardware by Heritage Metalworks of Downingtown; the glass autumnal scene on the door to the master wing, again by Emily Selvin; the stairs fashioned of quartersawn English oak and Hawaiian Koa with bronze inlays in a Celtic pattern; the deep mahogany wood that abounds on the ceiling beams and multitude of built-ins; and the plaster columns painted by Nancy Evers and her son, Holland, to imitate leather or the artwork, much of it by Israeli painter M. Rosentalis.

Alighting from the entrance, you are taken aback by the four-by-nine-foot glass French doors in the living room that provide a view of the terrace, with pool and Jacuzzi, handcrafted ironwork railing and the three meadows beyond. Immediately to your right is a built-in china cabinet that, when rotated, becomes a bar. To the left is the aforementioned doorway to the master suite. Upon entering is a contemporary-styled sitting room that houses a fireplace with a flat-screen TV above it, although you wouldn't know it. "All of the modern technology is encased in some way," Peter notes. The sitting area features another Rosentalis painting, but you might miss it because the thirty-eight-foot line of floor-to-ceiling glass along the walkway to the bedroom draws your eye to the terrace and the

landscape beyond yet again. "The home was designed so that you are always inside and able to look outside," Peter says. The flooring of the master suite is Travertine to match the terrace. The master bedroom features "his and her" bathrooms and dressing areas behind a hidden wood panel, designed by Fab Dubrunfaut. All wood in this area is English sycamore, quartersawn and fished to create a "wonderful effervescence and lots of movement." The bedroom features a J.S. Henry dressing table that inspired the greenish wall color in the master suite and the inlay detail in the stairwell.

Back in the main living space, there is a walk-in fireplace (there are five altogether serviced by two chimneys). The fireplace was again painted by Nancy Evers to mimic leather and wood and is flanked by a Chester County grandfather clock on one side and an Archibald Knox vase on the other. There is a natural flow from room to room here, which Peter calls "the heart and soul of the home." To the north of the living room is the dining room, divided from the space by a rondel glass art screen wall fashioned by Emily Selvin. Beyond the dining room is a butler's pantry inspired by Belgium Art Nouveau. All the wood is lacewood and walnut birl, again crafted by Fab Dubrunfaut.

The kitchen, not to be outdone by the rest of the home, is also a work of art. Off of the kitchen is a room that can be used as a screened-in porch overlooking the terrace in the warm months, or a sun room in the colder seasons. The second floor of the home features four bedrooms, all with terraces, three bathrooms, an exercise room and a study.

The owners did not use an interior decorator for their home, instead, it is filled with pieces they selected for their adherence to Arts & Crafts and comfort. "Everything comes together to make a singular statement," Peter says. "There is warmth and spirit." Truly an "epic" house destined to both awe and comfort generations to come. ❖

Stefanie Claypoole is a contributing writer with Chester County Town & Country Living and lives with her husband in West Chester, PA.



Archer & Buchanan Architecture, Ltd. partners (from left), Peter Archer, AIA, Richard Buchanan, AIA, and Daniel Russoniello, AIA, LEED AP.

Founded in 1996 and based in West Chester, Archer & Buchanan Architecture, Ltd., has a long resume of design work focused on new construction as well as renovations and additions. The firm of sixteen people has worked on institutional facilities, including Drexel University's Student Commons, Scott Arboretum, the Ronald McDonald House and Marshall Square Park in West Chester, but Peter Archer, AIA, says about eighty-five percent of their work is residential. Although you would be hard-pressed to say they have a signature style, the firm holds an "abiding interest in preserving and enhancing the region's beauty and cultural heritage through thoughtful, timeless architecture." In addition to Archer, partners include Richard Buchanan, AIA, and Daniel Russoniello, AIA, LEED AP.

The full-service firm strives to meet each client's needs through a collaborative process that combines a client's vision with the firm's know-how. Working in mostly a fifty-mile radius around West Chester, Archer & Buchanan's work can be found primarily throughout southern Chester County and the Main Line. "There are architectural principles that we adhere to no matter the style of the home—farmhouse, shingle, Arts & Crafts—and that is the relationship of the outside to the inside and the creation of flow," Archer says.

The firm has been recognized for so many projects it would be hard to list all of the accolades. The Pyramid Award, Palladio Awards, and AIA Design Awards are but a few. The firm's diverse portfolio includes new homes, historic renovations, restorations, and adaptive reuse of public and private buildings, equestrian facilities, educational institutions, and even a home built for a Tolkien fan who needed a "Hobbit style" structure to house his burgeoning memorabilia collection. Many of their creations have been featured in design magazines, including *Traditional Homes* to *Period Homes*.

To view the firm's work, visit www.archerbuchanan.com, or contacting them to schedule an appointment at 610-692-9112.