

Creative Living

Marie McGee editor/591-2300



Thursday, July 21, 1988 O&E

(F)1E

When the house itself is a work of art

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

IT WAS REGARDED AS an unbuildable lot. It dropped 50 feet from the edge of a quiet country lane to an artesian well pond at the base of a wooded ravine.

Beverly and Kenneth Neumann owned the lot for 15 years before the time was right for them to use their combined talents and come up with what would immediately become one of the most unusual houses in this part of the state. He is an architect and she is an artist.

The house is a contemporary trilevel.

Riding the slope of the land like a majestic ocean liner does the waves, proudly and efficiently. House and setting complement each other. Neither is diminished by the presence of the other. It is like a good marriage in which each partner shines as an individual, yet the total is greater than the sum of the parts.

"The shape of the house was determined by the trees," Beverly Neumann said. "We put windows at places where there are beautiful views."

In all there are 220 windows, offering one spectacular panorama after another. The front entrance by the garage opens to the entry hall that crosses open space to the third level where kitchen, breakfast room, dining room and one of two living rooms are located.

A DECK is on the west side off the dining room on the third level, and another is off the second-level living room above the ravine on the north side. Each, supported by a single pillar with braces to the corners, has the feeling of a house in the woods, even to the Adirondack-style porch furniture.

While area and function are clearly defined, it is often through use of the white metal railings, glass or curved partial walls. The sense of openness and light from all directions gives the atmosphere an almost translucent quality.

It is interesting that even though the design is unusual, the floor plan unfamiliar, the walls (with few small exceptions) painted white and spaces defined by curves and angles, there is no initial feeling of disorientation.

That's because the house has a rhythm, a flow and a continuity created by very careful planning. Many elements are specifically intended to guide the eye. Forms and materials, such as verdi (dark green) marble, are introduced and then repeated in other ways.

THIS CAREFUL attention to form and line begins outside. The redwood siding is painted white or a very soft gray with white to establish a pattern of horizontal lines. The horizontal lines of the siding are repeated in the white front gate, which opens to an inner courtyard and the front door.

The lines, separating the frosted panes in the pitched roof over the entry hall, are at an angle. In the vertical banks of windows, the horizontal lines are farther apart than those in the metal railings, but harmony is in all of these variations on a theme.

One of the most subtle is the cherry wood stripe in the hardwood floor at the base of the wall that runs from the living room into the dining room, put there to lead the eye.

THE USE of verdi marble begins with a panel in the entry hall floor and is repeated in the tub in the master bath, the hearth of the living room fireplace and the splash panels in the guest powder room.

"I love the way it looks. I love the overall quality," Beverly Neumann said of the house where they have lived for less than a year. "It's sophisticated without being high tech and quality without being pretentious."

Her creative abilities and her eye for color, style and design certainly are major factors in achieving these things.

THE NEUMANNs were never slaves to periods or styles of furnishings. He suggested, when she couldn't readily find what she wanted, that she look for pictures of things she liked for inspiration.

The breakfast in the dining room inspired by the work of Paul Frankel, designed by the couple and fabricated by Nelson Mill of Southfield. She found a picture of a Shaker jewel box with several drawers, expanded the idea and had the same Southfield company do it in cherry as a chest of drawers that covers almost a whole wall.

Lumen-Essence of Troy did the etched glass of the dining room table and the living room coffee table. The same style of chunky, sculptural wooden legs in different heights was used for both tables; again, repetition with modifications.

The natural wood floors throughout the house, the beautiful woods used in the custom-made furniture and the Italian-made dining room chairs with their beautiful solid panel curved backs, add a great deal of warmth to the atmosphere. The white background is an ideal setting for showcasing color, which comes from the family's collection of orien-



The steep pitch of the hill provided challenges, headaches and excitement for the architect, Kenneth Neumann, as well as the builder, Wineman & Komer.

tal rugs and the art.

ONE OF Beverly's newest works of art, a brilliant oil painting on birch plywood, the first of a Caribbean Series, on the two-story wall that goes from the upper to the lower living room, makes a dramatic and meaningful statement.

Her carved, painted totem pole in the entry hall with its colorful imagery is an immediate attention getter.

"It is a satirical piece about the 20th century," she said of the totem. "The Indians used animals as sym-

bols to explain their lives. Instead of hawks we have parakeets. Instead of moose and bison, we have cows."

She made a large, folding-screen-type painting for the master bedroom, titled "Body Parts," mildly erotic and

utilizing in an intimate setting. It is placed by a bank of low windows, so it, like many of her recent commissions, is functional as well as artistic.

"There are no window coverings in the house except in the bath-

rooms," she said.

IT TOOK two years to build the house. Many problems had to be overcome, such as getting the cement to the bottom of the ravine. All of the concrete blocks had to be carried down one by one. But all of that has begun to distance itself from the finished project, which in itself has become a work of art.

"You just go out and trust your instincts," said Neumann, who did all of the interior design herself.

As a kind of postscript it could be said that hers are more trustworthy than most.

The house is a contemporary trilevel, riding the slope of the land like a majestic ocean liner does the waves, proudly and efficiently.

Staff photos by Dan Dean



Looking down to the living room on the lower level gives an idea of the scope and range of scenic views. On the long wall is Beverly Neumann's colorful painting on cut-out board of fish and people from her Caribbean series.



From the living room on the upper level, Beverly Neumann can look down on her studio, directly below, or across to the dining room pictured at left. The two rooms are partially divided by the fireplace wall at her right. The small globes and wires over the dining room table are part of an unusual and delicate light fixture.