

## COVER STORY

Family fun:  
(Right) The residence offers comfort in every room.  
(Below) Nature and the architect work together to create an attractive setting inside and out.

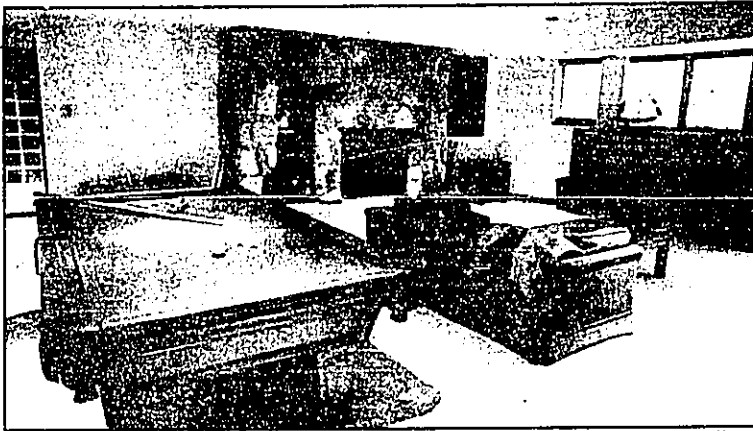


PHOTO BY WILLIAM HANSEN

On the cover: The library in an area home features a Pewabic tile fireplace and shelves designed by Birmingham architect Bill Gardner. Photo by William Hansen.

## Designer celebrates Arts & Crafts

BY CORDNE ABATT  
SPECIAL WRITER

If a new residence designed by Birmingham architect John Gardner was a person, you would say it has good genes. And you could add that a lot of them are Midwestern.

Gardner's clients, a couple with two teenage children, came to him because they had seen one of his houses. They already had a lot in Bloomfield Hills.

Saying, "She grew up in Indianapolis and he's from Chicago," Gardner determined they would like a house reflecting the great Arts and Crafts movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, still very much in evidence in those cities.

What Gardner didn't know immediately was that he would be designing furniture for the house and doing the landscape architecture as well.

"First time I've done furniture," he said.

As he spoke about his design philosophy, Gardner said, "I've always had sort of an abhorrence to large monumental buildings."

That's significant here, considering this house is 5,000 square feet on the main and upper levels, not including the finished lower level.

At first glimpse it has all the trappings of monumental, even to the waterless moat on each side of the bridged front entrance and the two-story banks of casement windows across the front and back. These windows, beneath a generous overhang, offer views of Endicott Lake on one side and a picturesque woods on the other. The wide overhang is reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wright's prairie house, but the style overall is highly individual.

"It looks larger than it is. It is really an assemblage of pieces with breezeways between and glass on both sides

of every piece. I like to take a large project and break it down into spaces, inside and out."

The spaces are large rectangles, connected by smaller ones. On the main level the large sections start with the master bedroom suite at the north end, followed by the den, the main entrance leading to the living room, the dining room, the kitchen and garage. On the second level are three more bedroom suites arranged over the central portion of the house.

What the architect calls breezeways are much grander than his name implies. They function like commas on a written page: to indicate a division and to provide definition. Ceilings in the breezeways are a foot lower than in the main rooms where they are eight feet eight inches. Archways leading from room to room are 10 feet wide. These changes of ceiling height not only define space, they all have a positive effect on sound as well.

As he described the house, Gardner said, "The materials we've used are like an old baseball glove: They will get better as they age."

He was referring to the fieldstone and cement plaster exterior, topped by a machine-cut cedar roof and the Brazilian cherry flooring and American cherry casework and cabinetry throughout the interior.

Beautiful tile from Detroit's Pewabic Pottery and other sources is used for the fireplaces in the living room, the library and the master suite as well as the bathrooms.

These materials and his design made it impossible to find the right furniture for certain key spaces.

"It started when they couldn't find the bed they wanted for the master suite, so I designed one (in American cherry) and had it fabricated."

In the entry hall, the handsome, slim, cherry table he designed exactly

fits the shallow curve of the wall.

His most interesting piece of furniture was serendipitous. When he and his client went searching for doors in architectural artifact shops, they returned with windows instead. Their find, brass-camed or latticework windows, was from a Milwaukee house built in 1903.

Gardner incorporated the windows in a hutch he designed for the dining room. They never did find doors, so he did eight-panel cherry ones and had them fabricated.

Birmingham interior designer Mary Magdelene is helping the owners blend furniture and art work from their former house with many new pieces that include some large Oriental rugs.

The jewel tones of these rugs in the living room, dining room and library provide strokes of brilliant color in a setting of white walls and the rich browns of the cherry floors and trim.

Then too, nature brings its palette of brilliant color into every room with

spectacular views - the blue of the lake, the variations of greens of the woods, the white of the stand of dogwoods (in early May) near the driveway and the changing hues of sunrises and sunsets.

In the library, the rich blues and greens of the striking large-patterned Oriental rug are repeated in the Pewabic tiles of the fireplace. The mantel is New York bluestone, the same material used outside on steps to the terrace. With its beautiful custom-made shelves and casework, this room incorporates much of the richness and comfort of the Arts and Crafts period.

Since he was also the landscape architect, Gardner's philosophy of breaking down a project into spaces is evident outside as well where there are intimate areas as well as broad vistas.

The most spectacular of these is the terrace that overlooks the lake. In every sense it is an extension of the living space of the house. There are four entrances to the terrace from the main level. Stairways on each side lead to the lower level family room. This room with a massive fieldstone fireplace has a Gardner-designed media center that fits its designated location to perfection.

From offices at opposite ends of the house for the parents to the bedroom suites for the children, individual wishes were respected.

"Everybody in the family got to play a role," Gardner said with an approving smile.

Gardner, a third-generation architect, is the principal of Gardner & Associates Architects of Birmingham. He completed his bachelor's and master's degrees in architecture at the University of Michigan and holds a degree in landscape architecture from Michigan State University.

