



NEUTRAL GROUND

WRITTEN BY ELISA CHEMAYNE AGOSTINHO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL LIPMAN

IT WAS THE SCENERY THAT FIRST GRABBED THEIR ATTENTION. The couple had been searching for a home in Highland Park, and when they saw the nearly two-acre tree-filled lot bordered on two sides by a ravine, they were sold. Indeed, so enchanted were the couple by the site that “we didn’t focus on the interior aesthetic at all,” says the husband. “It was only after we bought the house that we realized we’d have to do a complete gut job.”

Marked by 20-foot-high ceilings, large columns, stark white rooms and an incongruous Juliet balcony that heralded the entrance to the master suite and peered into the great room below, the house felt like a museum, according to the wife. “It was too formal and didn’t reflect the way we wanted to live.”

The two wanted a home where they could entertain family and friends, welcome large groups of out-of-town guests, and host political and charity events. Recognizing the enormous task before them—and not wanting the renovations to take a minute more than necessary—the couple called upon architect Michael A. Menn, AIA, CGR, CAPS, and builder Andy Poticha, principals of Design Construction Concepts, Ltd., in Northbrook.

“One of the main objectives for this project was a shortened time frame,” says Menn, who together with Poticha created a precise plan to fast-track the design and build. “Fast-tracking the project meant that deconstruction, construction and design were happening simultaneously throughout the house,” explains Menn. “A change made to one portion of the project, no matter how small, would affect others.” Therefore it was critical that the homeowners, architect,

ARCHITECT Michael A. Menn, AIA, Design Construction Concepts, Ltd.

HOME BUILDER Andy Poticha, Design Construction Concepts, Ltd.

INTERIOR DESIGNER Lauryn Pappas, Lauryn Pappas Interiors

BEDROOMS 7 | **BATHROOMS** 9 | **SQUARE FEET** 11,000

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A slab of white moon quartzite tops the kitchen island, which is crafted of oak; the glass and nickel fixtures above are from Vaughan. The 52-inch glass table "was made for entertaining," says Pappas.

STYLE SELECTION

With 24-karat gold leaf incorporated between two layers of hand-crafted and blown Murano glass, this piece gives the illusion of a vase floating within a vase. *Ovale Vase*, \$1,975; otium-nyc.com



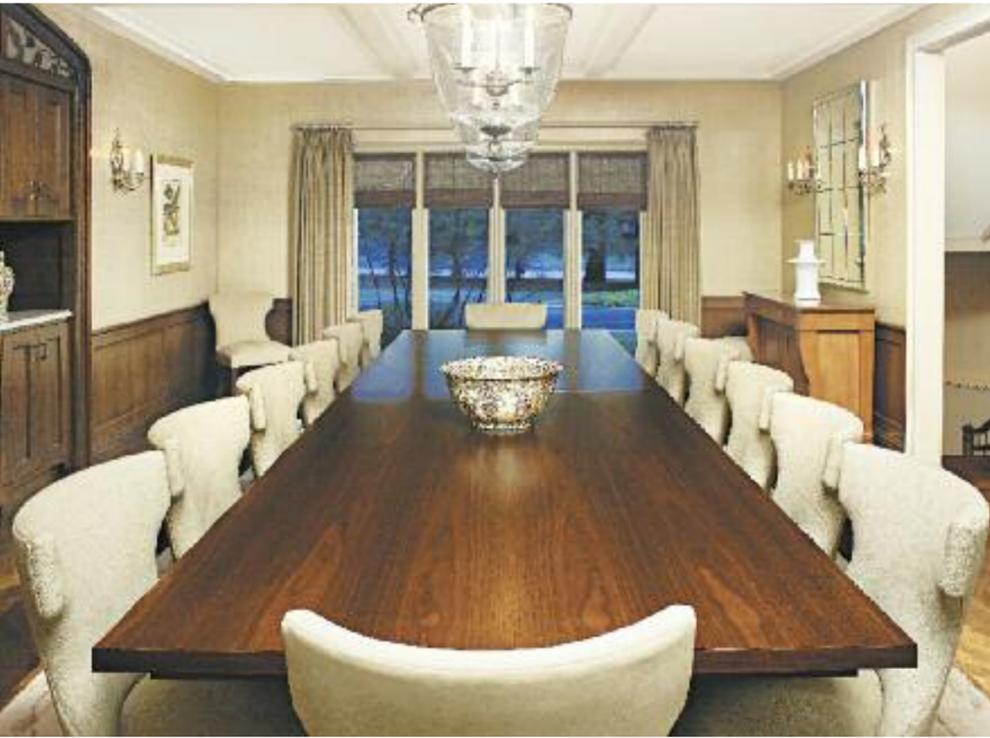
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builder and interior designer Lauryn Pappas, of Chicago-based Lauryn Pappas Interiors, work in tandem to ensure the timeline would not become compromised, regardless of on-site design modifications or unforeseen problems. "We had to work efficiently and judiciously," says Poticha. "There was very little room for extensions due to changes dictated by the field conditions or the homeowners."

So, as high ceilings in the great room were lowered to 12 feet to impart a sense of intimacy, the newfound "dead" space was used to create a large walk-in closet for the man of the house in the master suite above. The balcony and columns disappeared, and details like intricately constructed coffered ceilings and silky wood paneling now provide the home's architectural eye candy. The removal of an existing pantry in an adjoining space

BOUNTIFUL FEAST

A stained glass transom depicting pomegranates, custom-designed by Sharon Bladholm of Opal Glass Studios in Chicago, tops the built-in buffet. The large table was designed by Pappas.



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allowed for the expansion of the dining room, which now seats 22; and a massive built-in buffet was ingeniously tucked into a recess created by backing into the garage. “That was a brilliant idea,” enthuses the husband.

The kitchen remodel was another important component of the project, due to the number of guests—as many as 60 or 70 at a time—that may congregate in the house on any given weekend. There, the team brought in Doug Durbin, principal, and his assistant, Heather Johnson, of nuHaus and Exclusive Woodworking in Highland Park. “Doug is a genius, and Heather is just fantastic,” says Pappas. “And to be able to design our own custom hardware was delicious.”



PREMIER SEATING

A limestone and walnut bar hides behind wood paneling in the great room; the hand-scraped wood and bronze coffee table is from Gulassa & Co. Paul Ferrante fixtures light the space.

STYLE SELECTION

From the Rosenau Collection, this mahogany chair makes for a versatile and compatible piece with its classic lines and lovely form. *50005 Arm Chair, price available upon request; bolierco.com*



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Throughout, Pappas employed a neutral palette to create the warm, inviting environment the homeowners wanted. "I used lots of cocoa, gray, taupe and cream," says the designer. "I like to work with those colors because they're just so easy to live with." A subtle French striae was used in almost every room—"I glazed everything I could get my hands on," laughs Pappas—and custom furniture pieces fill the house. "What we couldn't find, we designed and built ourselves."

Today, the design team's concerted effort (the entire project was completed in just 11 months) has brought the couple the lifestyle they longed for. "Most people look forward to going on vacation," says the husband. "Here, we have that sense of peace and relaxation every day." **L**



NOOKS AND CRANNIES
An enclosed sunroom in the master suite provides a quiet space for the woman of the house to sit and reflect. Nearby steps lead to a loft area used by her husband as a home office and sports room.