

## Modern On Their Mind

Bucking tradition in the suburbs of Atlanta, an art-loving couple and their architect best friend created a relaxed contemporary showcase for their family's 21st-century lifestyle.

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**I**t began life as just another McMansion surrounded by many-gabled houses in faux-historical styles. So its rectilinear geometry and industrial-modern materials naturally piqued curiosity, not to mention surprise (the new building was constructed inside the shell of its predecessor, and the old facade was dropped only after the new home was finished). People now stop to take pictures. Strangers have wondered whether this is a welcome center for the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area—or a supermarket. "A man saw our kids playing and knocked to ask if it was a children's hospital," says Bonnie Fishman of the house her family calls the Fishtank. In Marietta, Georgia, bold modernism grabs attention.



This major reno-transformation was created for the Fishmans (Eric's an anesthesiologist, Bonnie's a marketing consultant) by Russell E. Sherman, a project architect at WRNS Studio in San Francisco. Best friends with Eric since

seventh grade, Sherman actually introduced the Fishmans and met his own wife at their wedding. Intimate familiarity with his clients helped him "make a house that was specific to them," the architect says.

The challenge of the project was twofold, he explains. First, it would be home to an exuberant family. "It's also this gallery-slash-entertainment house," Sherman continues. The Fishmans frequently host benefit parties for organizations like Atlanta's High Museum of Art. Often, when they expect 75 guests, 120 show up, all eager to get a look inside (the Fishmans' own impressive collection consists primarily of post-1960 photography).

An open kitchen/dining area was the "starting element" in redesigning the house, Bonnie recalls. It was so important to the Fishmans that it survived a cutback to the original design plan to meet the project budget. "Design derives from client needs," Sherman says. When the Fishmans entertain, "Eric is doing a lot of the cooking, or he's bringing in a chef friend. I can remember these conversations: 'If I'm cooking, I want to be able to look into the dining room. And I want to be able to see the river.'" Kevin Rathbun of Rathbun's and Gerry Klaskala of Aria, friends of the family who are both top Atlanta chefs, helped devise the kitchen layout.

"After using this kitchen for a while," Eric says, "I wouldn't do anything differently."

Another friend, Scott Reilly of [RetroModern.com](http://RetroModern.com), helped pick out the furniture. The dining tables—three, end to end—were chosen partly for their casual look, which recalls picnic tables. When places are needed for more people, tabletops of a similar finish and the same dimensions are placed onto folding tables, extending seating continuously into the living area. Other nights, Eric separates the three tables and rotates them 45 degrees. "Thirty guys come over and we play poker," he says.

Atlanta's climate invites indoor-outdoor living most of the year. Even on the hottest days of summer, the glass doors are slid back at least in the early mornings, to let in the breeze off the river. "From the beginning," says Eric, the house was "thought of in relation to this gorgeous, gorgeous piece of property."

Bonnie Fishman thinks of the master bedroom as "a retreat, a restorative space." It is quite modest in size; the contrast with the voluminous, flowing living areas surely enhances its feeling of refuge. But she worried that Sherman's design for the hearth, which extends even farther into the room than the wall above it, would take too much space. "That's an example of how I took the leap and trusted him because I know him so well," she says. And if anything, this strong, dark horizontal element makes the room seem larger.

Much of the furniture in the house was sourced from [RetroModern.com](http://RetroModern.com), and Scott Reilly is known in the Fishman household as "the furniture devil" for his trick of delivering pieces without warning and urging the Fishmans to "just live with them for a while." Most, of course, end up as keepers. The Fishmans already

owned the red Saarinen *Womb* chair and ottoman, and, Reilly told them, "with that, all you need in the bedroom is an unbelievable bed." The one they acquired was the first example from the Pi line (from the Belgian maker Juventa) ever produced in American king size. "I called in the measurements," Reilly says. "Now it's in production."

A hallway, but no door, separates the master bath; the shower is unenclosed. These absences subtly reinforce the suite's privacy. "Certainly it is not a design for the inhibited," Bonnie says of it—and the house—"but there isn't a morning or an evening when I don't appreciate the calmness and beauty of my surroundings."

### **Details**

"Eric and I first saw Scavolini cabinets when we were traveling in Europe," says Bonnie Fishman, "and fell in love with them" for their construction, design options and value. Architect Russell E. Sherman, working with Atherton Appliance (the manufacturer's rep), selected units from two lines, one finished in laminate and the other fronted with glass. Since they share a basic look—and the same handles—the two models combined seamlessly. The glass is more expensive, but costs were moderated by using it strategically. "Even though it's a big space, it's not very deep," Sherman says of the windowless kitchen area, but still "we get a little reflectivity." The tempered glass, mounted on resilient aluminum frames for strength, is screen-printed on the back with lacquer, rendering it translucent. It is impervious to water, and delamination is never an issue. Bonnie says it's "not only striking but also incredibly easy to take care of" with just a cloth and glass cleaner.

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