

The name of the property pictured on these pages could conceivably be described as a double entendre. On one level, it could allude to the homeowner's family, who left the Old Country in search of opportunity in America. On another level, it could pertain to the fact that generations later, its descendants are reaping the rewards of those dreams. Perhaps it was both scenarios that inspired the homeowner to christen the 10-acre property on which he lives "Terre dei Sogni," or

Land of Dreams

BY SUE LONG

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALLAN HOLM

For a time, the homeowner and his wife feared that "nightmare" might be a more apt way to describe the house they envisioned building on their newly acquired land. After working with three architects over the course of two years, they were discouraged. "They just weren't getting us," he explains.

Their vision entailed a house that would almost be foreign to a landscape that pays homage to Colonial and traditional design. "Hey, I grew up in a big ethnic family!" the homeowner remarks. "Williamsburg was not spoken in our family."

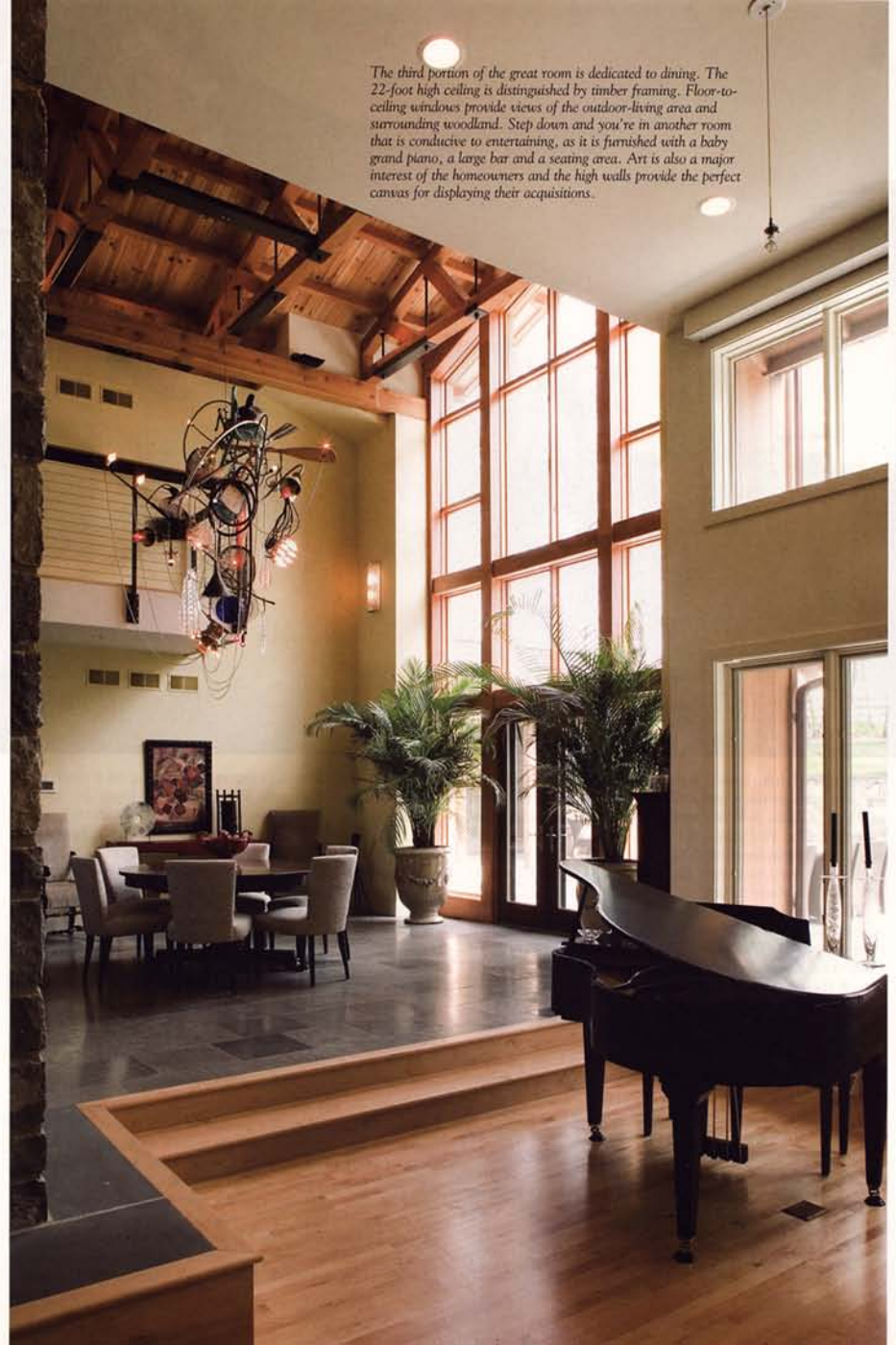
He and his wife, Baby Boomers who had reached empty-nest status, had bought 10-plus acres of woodland in 1999, with plans to build a home that truly captures their personalities and myriad of interests. "I guess you could call our style 'eclectic,'" he proposes.

A tour of the space is akin to a trip around the world. Objects of art from Italy, New York, Santa Fe, Philadelphia and other favorite destinations help to define the rooms. The great room area is befitting of a Colorado mountaintop. The kitchen would be any chef's idea of nirvana. The design of the glass-enclosed wine cellar is based on one found in a restaurant affiliated with the Culinary Institute of America's Napa Valley campus. A floating staircase would look right at home in a New York loft. Sunny climes such as Florida inspired the outdoor living area that spans the back of the house and nestles into a hillside.

As for the architect who was ultimately selected to carry out the project, the homeowners found their guru in Jeff



The layout of the first floor keys into the homeowners' love of cooking and entertaining. The display kitchen enables them to cook and enjoy the company of their guests, who have the option of sitting at the bar or lounging on the leather sectional sofa. Overhead, an open walkway provides access to second-floor guest rooms.



The third portion of the great room is dedicated to dining. The 22-foot high ceiling is distinguished by timber framing. Floor-to-ceiling windows provide views of the outdoor-living area and surrounding woodland. Step down and you're in another room that is conducive to entertaining, as it is furnished with a baby grand piano, a large bar and a seating area. Art is also a major interest of the homeowners and the high walls provide the perfect canvas for displaying their acquisitions.



Wyant. "We felt he could take our ideas and make them reality," the homeowner stresses. Credit for the connection goes to Irene Keares, whose family owns such restaurants as Gibraltar, Doc Hollidays and Lily's. "I've known Irene for years," the homeowner explains. "One day, she overheard me venting my frustration over the house plans and she suggested I talk to her son-in-law."

The homeowners acted on the referral and made the acquaintance of Jeff, who's the principal architect of Wyant Architecture in Philadelphia. Jeff's partner in the firm is his wife, Maria Keares Wyant. "We met at Carnegie Mellon," he says of their alma mater. Jeff, who hails from Meadville, in northwestern Pennsylvania, didn't dream of being an architect. "I started out as an art major," he notes.

Upon graduating, Jeff and Maria worked for large firms in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia and in 2001, struck out on their own. "It's us and two interns," he says. "And I can't forget Irene - I call her our 'director of marketing.'"

Jeff appreciates the flexibility that working in a small firm provides. "The benefit to being a smaller firm is that we remain very involved in our projects from beginning to end," Jeff explains. "And we work with many different project types, keeping our practice diverse. Right now, we're working on a \$2.5 million residential project in Center City Philadelphia, as well as a multi-family residential complex and a self-serve storage facility in Chester County."

Family projects also keep the firm busy. Jeff, who designed

Gibraltar with Maria, is currently working on a room addition for Gus's Keystone Restaurant in Mount Joy and an addition for The Brasserie (formerly D&S Brasserie), which is now owned by Ted Skiadas and his son Christopher. Another Skiadas project, smilebuilderz inc., with Dr. Anthony Skiadas, entails a new-concept dental office in Manheim Township. He also designed the renovations/additions for the Benecon Group's headquarters on the Oregon Pike.

Jeff describes his Philadelphia base and Lancaster connection as the best of both worlds. "Our Philadelphia location allows us to maintain a regional presence," he explains. "Without that presence, I don't think we'd be able to get projects like the Center City renovation. On the other hand, we're close enough to Lancaster that taking on projects such as this isn't a problem. I come to Lancaster every Tuesday to meet with clients," Jeff reports.

Still, it's not often that Lancaster clients such as these seek Jeff's guidance. "We wanted to build this as a homestead and not an investment; resale wasn't an issue," the homeowner points out. In other words, they wanted what they wanted, even if they weren't sure exactly what that was. "I had no idea what the exterior was going to look like," the homeowner admits. "The only thing I knew I wanted was a metal roof and lots of stone. We left the rest up to Jeff."

While the original footprint of the house met with the homeowners' approval, they weren't enamored of the interi-

A massive, stone fireplace serves to both separate and unite the first-floor living areas. Unique glass forms a wall that separates the main entrance and the great room. The glass wall was also outfitted with niches in which art can be displayed. A floating staircase leads to the second-floor guest rooms.

or. "Some of the plans from the previous architects were *too* unusual," the homeowner continues. "I could imagine visitors coming in and saying 'Wow,' and, as they left, say to each other 'How odd,' or 'What were they thinking!' We had to be able to live in the space and we left it up to Jeff to make it livable, yet unusual. We relied on him to bring clarity to the plans."

Jeff immersed himself in the project by engaging in long conversations with the couple in order to connect with them. He also became heavily involved in the material selection process. "He went everywhere with us," the homeowner notes, "including quarries."

Jeff also coordinated his efforts with a number of Philadelphia colleagues on the project, including interior designer/decorator R.J. Thornberg; his partner, Warren Muller, who designed many of the lighting sculptures; and Melanie Lewandowski, a Feng Shui consultant. "My mother was very superstitious," the homeowners says, adding that learning about and following Feng Shui principles has been an interesting process. "This is a great Feng Shui property," the owner comments, "especially where the house is sited." Adds Jeff: "The lot is low in the front and there's a hill in the



back, so we were able to incorporate a daylight basement. Plus, the house is sited in such a way that it takes full advantage of the sun."

Otherwise, the house features the work of Lancaster County craftsmen, as well as products from a number of local stores. Local contributors included Galen G. Miller, Jim Gribble, Lancaster County Timber Framing, Paradise Custom Kitchens, J.B. Zimmerman, Bomberger's, Bed and Bath Affair, Outdoor Living Systems and Jackson's Window Shoppe.

One thing became obvious – the couple loves to entertain. As the kitchen is the domain of the male half of the equation, he wanted a space that was open, functional and beautiful. "I wanted the kitchen to be part of the entertainment," the homeowner notes. "Plus, I wanted to be able to interact with guests even if I was in the kitchen." In order to arrive at a functional design, Jeff dissected the homeowner's usual routine as he went about preparing his favorite dishes. The lesson enabled Jeff to determine where the appliances – Thermador refrigerator and cook top, steaming components, two dishwashers and wall ovens – would be placed.

Paradise Custom Kitchens' John Wenger was

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A multi-purpose transitional room provides the master suite with a sitting area, plus enables guests using the pool area to escape the sun. Amenities include a spa, a flat-screen television and easy access to the bar. Outdoors, the options include a waterfall-fed plunge pool and a lap pool. Access to a lower-level exercise room can be gained from this area, as well.



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brought into the project to design the cabinetry. "It's definitely not your traditional cherry kitchen," John attests. "It's a totally different and unique look for Lancaster County. He describes the door style as a "full-overlay Shaker" and points out that the clean, sleek lines of Shaker styling often translate into contemporary quite well.

John admits that it was the color that had him a bit perplexed – Benjamin Moore Paints' Texas Leather, a paint color that was also used on the doors and trim throughout the first floor, might be described as being one step away from Battleship Grey. In fact, when PCK's craftsmen showed John some of the finished doors, he was skeptical. "Is this going to look right?" he asked himself. However, when John saw the total package, he was impressed (and relieved). "It's beautiful," he says of the finished kitchen. "It just sparkles. The stainless steel appliances, the black granite, the tiled backsplash and the hardware knitted together with the cabinetry quite well. The kitchen has a true professional look, yet it's warm and inviting."

The kitchen also represents a departure from the large spaces that have ruled design for the past decade. Intimacy was the goal here. However, elements normally seen in today's kitchen – mini-office, pantry, cabinetry, etc. – were given a space of their own between the kitchen and garage. The unseen, galley-like space is also home to a foyer-like entrance from the garage, coat closets and a laundry room. The area essentially serves to keep clutter from entering the

living spaces. Access to a wing containing two guest rooms and a bath are gained through the space, as well.

The first floor is also home to a sitting area that's outfitted with a mix of furnishings, including an ultra-modern leather sectional sofa. The space melds into a dining room that features a round table over which a lighting sculpture hangs. The ceiling soars 22 feet above and features exposed trusses made of Douglas fir and capped with steel plates; pine decking composes the ceiling. Jeff says that structurally, the design of the great room was inspired by a pavilion at a Boy Scout lodge he had once visited.

An industrial-looking staircase that climbs upward from the foyer and follows the length of the great room leads to two more guest rooms. Wendy Dowling of Bed and Bath Affair worked with the homeowners to select linens for each of the five bedrooms in the house. "Their bedroom was the last to be done," she recalls. "They were more concerned that their family and friends would feel welcomed and be comfortable."

Take a step down and you're in a more formal living room, the highlights of which are a granite bar, a baby-grand piano and paintings of two Chinese elders that dominate a wall. The spaces are separated by a floor-to-ceiling stone fireplace.

The first-floor master suite contains a bedroom, bath, expanse of closet space, dressing area and an in-home office. "Again, the bedroom is not large when it comes to today's standards," Jeff notes. Instead, emphasis was placed on details such as a fireplace and the windows that are covered with remote-controlled blinds that disappear into the window casings.

The lower level of the house might be described as a Baby Boomer's playground. An exercise room can be accessed via a spiral staircase that leads from the master suite or from an outside entrance. The adjacent bathroom boasts a sauna and steam unit. An entertainment room is home to the wine cellar and a humidor. "We've built a number of ladders for use in a library," John Wenger notes. "But this might be the first time we've done one for a wine cellar."



The kitchen is state-of-the-art from an appliance perspective.



The highlights of this "grown-up" rec room include a billiard table, a stone fireplace, a flat-screen television, a humidor and a wine cellar whose design is based upon one found in a restaurant at the Culinary Institute of America's Napa Valley campus.

Harmonizing with nature was another issue that Jeff was charged with addressing. "It was important to my clients that the indoor and outdoor spaces merge," he explains. Thus, the reason for the banks of windows and

doors that provide unsurpassed views of the property. Stone covers floors, comprises the fireplaces and forms walls outdoors. Bleached hardwood covers the floors in the great room. Granite covers surfaces in the kitchen

and the master bath. Even the wall colors hearken to nature.

The patio is easily accessible via a series of French doors that form a glass wall in a room that holds a Jacuzzi. Water features (lap and plunge pools and a waterfall), an outdoor kitchen and an expansive patio provide the perfect setting for simply relaxing the day away or entertaining dozens of guests late into the evening. "Transitional zones such as the Jacuzzi room create overlays," Jeff points out.

Despite the fact that four years were devoted to the design/build process, the homeowners continue to view their home as a work in progress. Landscaping will be the focus of activity this summer. Acquiring art is an ongoing process. "We put a lot of thought into our art acquisitions," the homeowner explains. "We know what we're looking for, but are willing to take our time."

Jeff views projects in much the same manner. He appreciates a client "who allows him to go to extra lengths to create something that is special and

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The Zen-like master bath is outfitted with his-and-her vessel sinks, a walk-in glass shower and a soaking tub.

The master bedroom provides a quiet and cozy getaway. Here, too, the goal was to unite the indoors with the outdoors through using stone and incorporating a number of windows into the design (the windows on the left look into the transitional room).



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unique. The fact that they were willing to work through it says a lot," he notes. He also is complimentary of Lancaster County workmanship. "If you get the right people working with you, anything can be accomplished," Jeff remarks. ♦

Credits:

Architect: Jeff Wyant, AIA/Wyant Architecture, Philadelphia
Project Architect: Joost Langeveld, RA Home Builder: Galen G. Miller, Inc.
Timber Trusses: Lancaster County Timber Framing
Stone Mason: James J. Gribble Masonry Contractors
Decorator: R.J. Thornberg/Bahdeebadu, Philadelphia
Lighting Sculptures: Warren Muller/Bahdeebadu, Philadelphia
Cabinetry Design (Kitchen and Guest Baths): John Wenger, CKD/Paradise Custom Kitchens
Kitchen Appliances: J.B. Zimmerman
Tile/Installation: Bomberger's
Bed Linens/Accessories: Bed and Bath Affair
Window Treatments: Jackson's Window Shoppe
Landscaping: Ray Boltz/Erb Bros.
Swimming Pools: Anthony & Sylvan Pools
Hardscaping: Outdoor Living Systems

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