

WASHINGTON DC • MARYLAND • VIRGINIA

The Magazine of Architecture and Fine Interiors

# HOME & DESIGN

## 6 Amazing Kitchens

**AT HOME** WITH  
Chef Nick Stefanelli

**HIGH STYLE**  
IN Kenwood

**WATERGATE**  
Revisited





An abstract sculpture by Joel Urruty graces the foyer (this page), where designer Michael Stehlik replaced old-fashioned spindles with curved steel stair rails. Carrara marble frames the fireplace in the family room (opposite).

# *An Artistic Aura*

Designer Michael Stehlik transforms a traditional home into a modern backdrop for paintings and sculpture



BY CATHY APPLEFELD OLSON  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANICE HOACHLANDER

# W

hen a newly retired Potomac Falls, Virginia, couple sought to update their traditional home to accommodate both their art collection and their desire for increased accessibility, designer Michael Stehlik of CARNEMARK saw the writing on the wall.

“The words I kept hearing over and over were ‘contemporary’ and ‘clean-lined.’ We wanted to create a space that was clearly designed for displaying art,” Stehlik says of his early conversations with homeowners Dee and John Benda. “And that meant opening the space and straightening out some funny-angled walls on the first floor.”

Once Stehlik reconfigured the walls and raised a dated—and decidedly non-ergonomic—sunken living room, the stage was set to transform the space, including the addition of an elevator with three-level access. The goal was to create a warm, gallery-like showcase for paintings and sculptures—but under Stehlik’s studied eye even the utilitarian objects would come to transcend their everyday purpose and adopt an artistic aura of their own.

Nowhere is this more evident than the master bath, where a sculptural tub resides mid-room, a glass shower redefines a corner and a vanity is centered amid a sea of marble. “We wanted to create rooms where each element is treated as its own individual object,” Stehlik says. “So rather than slathering cabinets on the wall from end to end, rather than build the tub into a deck, each element floats and is carefully positioned for effect. Even the powder-coated steel bowls on the vanity are set there purposefully.”

The same principal guides the kitchen, newly opened to the dining and family rooms. “We entertain a lot, so we wanted a lot of openness and a practical living space,” says Dee Benda. “By removing and reconfiguring the walls, now everyone can be in the area without crowding each other.”

.....  
**RENOVATION DESIGN:** MICHAEL STEHLIK,  
CARNEMARK, Bethesda, Maryland. **DESIGN/BUILD:**  
CARNEMARK, Bethesda, Maryland.



Stehlik created alcoves to accentuate the homeowners’ art collection. In the dining room, a photograph by Donald Syriani makes a bold statement. The table and chairs are by B&B Italia.



An inviting walnut-topped bar balances the glossy gray-lacquered cabinetry and smoky obsidian glass display cabinets, which are situated in perfect proportion on either side of the cooktop. “We created a niche for cabinets to fit in rather than overwhelm the space,” Stehlik says. “Here again it was a matter of grounding the cabinetry rather than having it go wall to wall.”

The Bendas’ artwork adorned not only a smattering of display alcoves—like the two found in the gracious dining room—but also the neutral palette of colors and materials that prevail on the first floor. Stehlik opted for soft white on most of the walls, and wide-plank oak flooring runs throughout. Cohesive elements abound. The Carrara marble that frames the fireplace in the family room is the same material used for the kitchen backsplash and counter.

“Those walls face each other and so we wanted to repeat that material, infusing the house with a consistent palette,” Stehlik says. “The whole house feels like it was washed by the same hand.”

Presiding over Stehlik’s clean, open design is the grand staircase, which was already curved but had been encased in Colonial-style spindles. Stehlik wasted no time replacing the traditional vertical spindles with curved stainless-steel rails that continue on a horizontal trajectory around the perimeter of the second-floor walkway. “It’s another continuation of the kind of details they wanted to bring to the house and the palette of neutrals, grays and stainless steel,” he says.



Stehlik also selected Carrara marble for the backsplash and countertops in the kitchen (these pages), newly opened to the dining and family rooms. A walnut-topped bar balances the glossy gray-lacquered cabinetry and smoky obsidian glass display cabinets by SieMatic.



“We infused the house with a consistent palette so it feels like it was washed by the same hand.” —MICHAEL STEHLIK

Adding an elevator posed a few design and engineering challenges, including pouring a thick concrete slab in the basement for the footprint and—in contrast to the first floor—adding walls in the voluminous master bedroom to designate a vestibule for the elevator and to infuse the room with a sense of intimacy. “We wanted to give more definition to the space,” Stehlik explains.

In perhaps the most resounding statement of a satisfied client, as soon as the redesign was complete the Bendas called

on Stehlik to transform the one part of the house that had not been part of the initial plan—their guest suite.

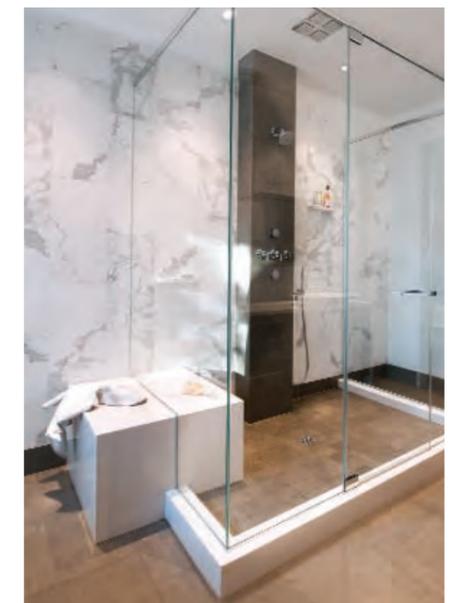
The space now comprises two spacious bedrooms, each with its own connecting bath. “To add all that, you’d think you’d have to do an addition,” Stehlik says. “But we were able to carve out the space and create more than modest-sized bathrooms, too. It was just a matter of maximizing use of the space and getting rid of those funky angles.”

In fact, defining new spaces throughout

the house—particularly with those angled walls and soffits on the first floor—was the designer’s greatest challenge. “Of course, we tried to make them look like they’d been executed on purpose,” Stehlik says with a slight chuckle. “In general, contemporary design leaves little room for flaws.” ❖

*Writer Cathy Applefeld Olson is based in Alexandria, Virginia. Anice Hoachlander is a principal with Hoachlander Davis Photography in Washington, DC.*

FOR RESOURCES, SEE PAGE 164



The new elevator opens into the master bedroom (opposite), where new walls create a sense of intimacy. In the master bath, a sculptural tub by Waterworks resides mid-room (left), a glass shower (above) redefines a corner and a vanity with vessel sinks by Alape (top) is centered amid a sea of marble.