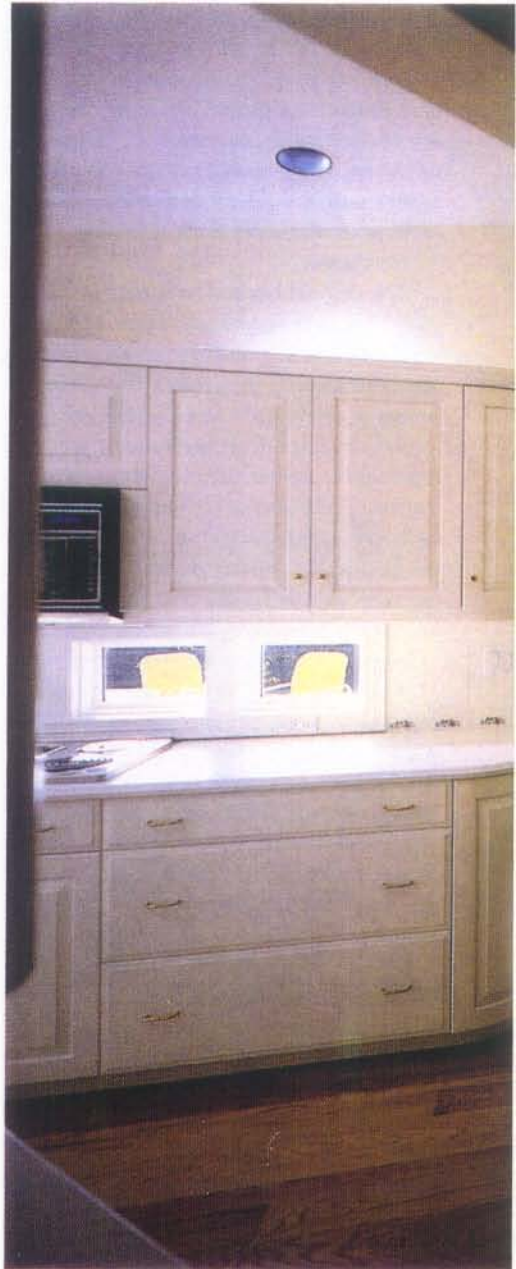


ALL THE RIGHT ANGLES

With the help of Barbara's architect son, Bill and Barbara Parnell joined forces to create a home that is comfortably familiar but also filled with surprises.

by Marsha Mah



"WE'RE SO GLAD YOU'RE NOT putting up another colonial," neighbors told Bill and Barbara Parnell when they began construction on their new custom home on an empty lot in a 30-year-old neighborhood.

Colonial, it's definitely not. But how would you describe the Parnells' rambling two-story, four-bedroom house? With its spacious front porch, it could be a farmhouse. And there are whimsical architectural details that recall Victorian flights of fantasy. But the soaring, flowing space inside is strictly 1990s.

"It's based on the familiar image of a late 19th-century farmhouse but in every respect it is contemporary," says architect Tom Dever, Barbara's son, who designed the home. "All the detailing is either playful or very contemporary." Even the exterior of

the home is a contrast of old and new: It looks like old-fashioned stained cedar clapboard but actually is low-maintenance vinyl.

The house represents a fresh start for the Parnells, who both lost spouses in tragic accidents several years ago. When they decided to get married almost three years ago, they each sold their older, traditional homes to build this one together. A lot of thought went into its design. "They wanted a house built for the way people live, not the hypothetical next buyer," says Dever.

Bill, who recently took early retirement from Du Pont as financial director of staff functions, volunteers as a soccer coach and a tutor in the Chester County Adult Literacy Consortium. Barbara works part-time at her daughter's one-of-a-kind clothing boutique, Endeavor, in Glen Eagle Square,

on Route 202 near Glenn Mills, Pa.

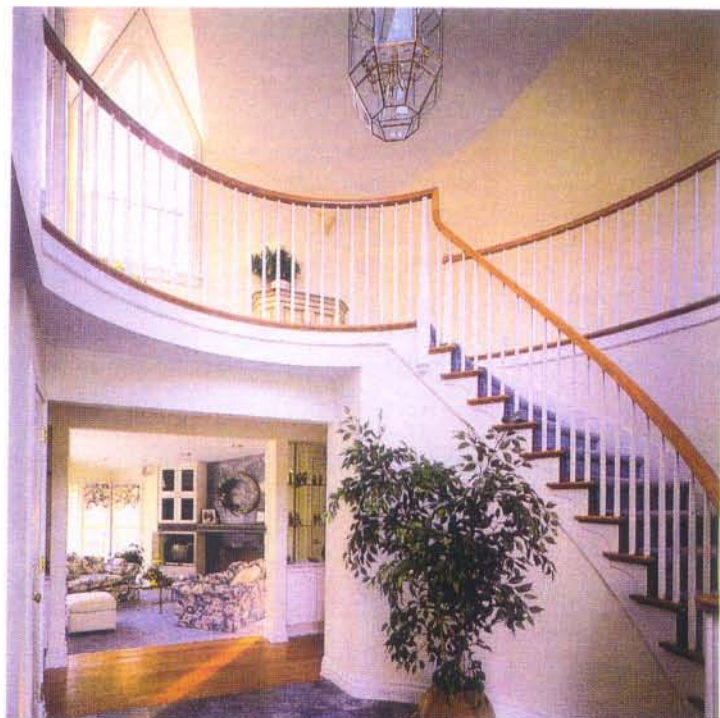
Between the two of them, the Parnells have eight grown children. With the exception of one son, all the children either live with them or nearby. So at a time in life when many couples are "downsizing," the Parnells needed plenty of room to accommodate and entertain a large blended family.

The house was built on an empty lot in a development where Barbara and her family lived for many years, near the intersections of Route 202 and U.S. Route 1 in Pennsylvania. "We used to play baseball on this lot," says Dever. "I tell everyone that's why the family room is shaped like home plate."

Flowing spaces and odd angles characterize the living space. There are more than the usual number of interior walls, but not always where you expect to find them, separating rooms. Few rooms in the house are



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WILLIAM DOUDS



Far left: The Parnell home, sited on a vacant lot in an older subdivision, is a contemporary interpretation of a 19th-century farmhouse. The front view only hints at the unusual angles and spaces inside.

Above: Shades of blue-gray and rose dominate the family room and breakfast nook. The hallway leads to the master bedroom suite, which has its own private deck and office area. Note the unusually placed windows in the kitchen.

Left: A nod to East Coast formality, the two-story entry features a marble floor and a dramatic curved staircase. Beyond the entry is a light-filled family room, which overlooks an expansive deck and backyard pool.

actually rectangular — many are five- or six-sided. A small first-floor powder room has seven walls. The home is also angled across the lot.

"The front hints at the angles in the interior, but it has a more traditional feeling. But the back shows directly what's going on inside — all the angles," says Dever. "But the angles aren't a gimmick — they accomplish something."

The angles provide privacy, since few windows look out directly on neighboring homes. There is a sense of isolation, even though the house is in the middle of a development. The angled walls — with their many windows — also bring in an enormous amount of light during the day. "We wanted the house to feel bright and alive," says Barbara Parnell. "We wanted it to be comfortable."

The first-floor plan is open, with rooms forming nooks off the central spine. The blue-carpeted family room opens onto a breakfast area, which opens onto a white-on-white kitchen, featuring white cabinets and white Corian countertops.

"We both had very dark kitchens before," says Parnell, "but this space was too open to go with stained wood." The kitchen is almost octagonal in shape. "It's great to

work in," says Parnell, because she's literally surrounded by counters and storage space. An unusual touch: Instead of tile along the backsplash, a row of small rectangular windows span the distance between countertop and upper cabinets. A skylight brings in light from above. "There is a lot of light from all angles. The kitchen takes on different moods at different times," says Parnell.

It's "a fun kind of house," says Parnell, but there are a few concessions to what Dever calls "East Coast formality." A dramatic, two story-foyer features a marble floor and curved staircase. To the right of the entryway is a formal living room, and to the left a formal dining room, which the Parnells use mostly for buffet-style entertaining rather than sit-down dinner parties.

Dever says that whenever he designs a house, he likes to create one or two pieces of customized furniture. This time it was a table and buffet made to fit the formal dining room. The impetus was a custom-made blue-gray and rose rug, which Parnell didn't want to cover up. Dever created a "floating" buffet, attached to one wall, and a dining table with a glass top, plus distinctive high-backed chairs. The wood is white-washed birch, sponge-painted in barely-there shades of blue-gray and rose.

A marble fireplace, with built-in entertainment units on either side, is the focal point of the family room. The space extends to a rear deck, overlooking a backyard pool. The Parnells' master bedroom suite is also located on the first floor. A small office area, which opens to its own mini-deck, serves as a transition between the public and private areas of the home. "Whenever we design a bedroom on the first floor, we try to create a buffer," says Dever.

Three second-floor bedrooms provide privacy for visiting adult children and in-laws. White walls and woodwork, hardwood floors and floral fabrics and wallpaper visually unify both floors. Both the master bedroom and an upstairs guest bedroom feature flowered patterns in different shades of rose. Downstairs, in the family room, artist Julie Sterner picked up the floral motif of the sofa fabric for a wall mural in the breakfast nook. "I just love flowers," says Parnell.

Dever admits that when he designs a custom home, he usually gets to know the client "pretty well," but this time he had a head start. "Tom was great to work with," says his mother. "We had a normal client/architect relationship — we met with him in his office — but he already knew so many little things about us." ♦

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