



Dramatic and Different Contemporary Living
in a Traditional Valley Town

modern family

by **Beth Daigle** photos by **Eric Roth**

Ultracontemporary is not top of mind when thinking about homes in the Merrimack Valley, but that did not deter a Boxford couple who replaced their 900-square-foot, single-level ranch with a 3,300-square-foot, Latvian inspired, contemporary home of their dreams.

Though some empty nesters choose to downsize from the family homes they've occupied for decades, these homeowners opted to realize a vision that would take them into the next 20 years of their lives together. Happy to remain in the spot where they reared their two sons, who are now living in New York City and San Francisco, the couple elected to level their first home and rebuild.

"We like our street and neighbors and we know what works here; it really is a good lot," the wife explains. "We really like that we have southern exposure, and always knew that would be great for large windows."

The couple, who asked not to have their names used, chose to incorporate styles and materials reminiscent of their Latvian roots. They collaborated with Peterman Architects in Concord and Howell Custom Building Group in Lawrence to create a home that appealed to their sensibilities and aesthetic preferences. The result is a unique blend of Malibu beach house, urban industrial loft and Scandinavian design.

"It is rare when you find clients that have the kind of vision and courage to do something like this," architect Tom Peterman says. "Most of what we do is very traditional, vernacular, New England-style architecture. This was a refreshing break for us."

The home sits a short distance from the road, pleasantly

surrounded by trees and an engaging landscape. The exterior is the first of many eye-catching visuals that contribute to the dramatically different nature of this home.

The use of natural materials and Northern European influence work well in the context of the home's neighborhood, despite its unconventional facade. Light wood, ample windows, metal accents and unusual shapes are features consistent with various examples of industrial architecture brought to the design table by the homeowners. According

to the wife, the soon to be completed National Library of Latvia features many of the design characteristics that she and her husband desired. Beyond appearance, the couple also took great care to articulate how they would like to live and move about in the space. The ultimate vision was less about square footage and more about how each space was connected with the next.

"There can be so many different interpretations with modern architecture that it took awhile to hone in on exactly what the homeowners' tastes were," Peterman says. "We looked at a lot of examples of modern houses and went through a lot of options before we got to this vision."

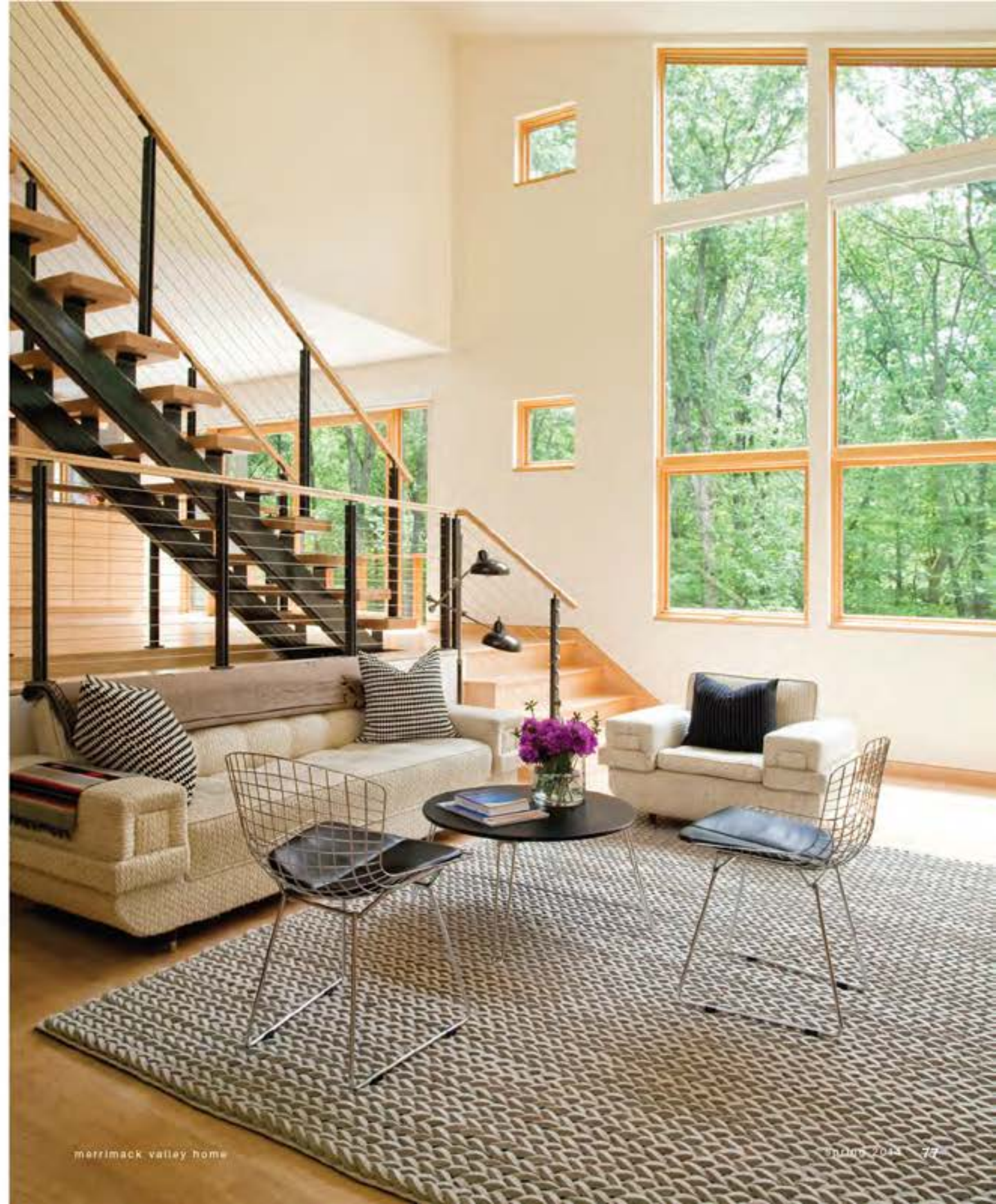
Though achieving optimal natural light was a specific goal, the homeowners did not anticipate the significant indoor to outdoor connection that it would afford them.

"In the planning process, you end up spending a lot of time looking at layouts and footprints, and looking at the house in pictures rather than looking out from the house," the wife explains. "Now, every time you look somewhere, you are looking outside. Without that connection to the outside, I don't think this house would be as successful."

There is no denying the striking impact of this home.



Previous page: While minimalist in nature, the details of this contemporary home were meticulously thought out. The roof line, for example, was designed to mimic the fall of the land that surrounds it. It is considered to be a unifying element that dramatically ties all of the spaces together. The house angles down the hillside on which it stands, following the topography of the natural terrain of the land. This page: A close-up of the main staircase's custom metal work demonstrates the craftsmanship involved in a high traffic space that might otherwise be overlooked. Opposite page: The open living space is set between the kitchen and the library. Here the family gathers to listen to music, play games and enjoy each other's company. The open layout allows for ease of communication between spaces.





The contrasting materials and clean lines are immediately appealing to the modernist eye.

"The design was pure and stripped of ornamentation," builder Stephen Howell says. "But achieving very clean, consistent, simple lines can be just as challenging as wrapping moldings around everything. When you wrap moldings and ornamentation around structural elements, windows and doors, you can hide a lot of sins."

Outside, the clear-finished, Douglas fir siding envelops the home in rich hues of reddish brown, while metallic, exterior PVC panels offset the natural wood to create an unexpectedly harmonious juxtaposition. The PVC panels are a material element influenced by a similar design at a local Nissan dealership. The economical PVC was chosen over a more costly porcelain alternative and spray-painted in satin nickel to crisply contrast the warmth of the Douglas fir.

The home's interior is decidedly minimalist. The persistent use of light-colored maple in its flooring, trim and cabinetry creates a seamless flow. Repeating tile and granite in bathrooms and the front entryway also helps produce a cohesive look. Earthy, pebble-patterned, Jurassic green granite can be found in multiple bathrooms, while green and rustic-toned slate tile flooring are each used in two or more locations. The earth tones and natural cleft of these tiles exude a European styling that is comfortably luxurious.

Perhaps most visually contiguous is the use of stainless steel cable railing on both the interior stairway and the exterior decking. The visual extension of these cables and fittings creates an unmistakable union between the interior and exterior spaces.

Although the recurrent use of certain materials did come into question, the homeowners stood by their choices.

"We were told that it was too much maple but, to us, it feels right," the wife says. "I think throughout, in the bathrooms, too, it just gives much more continuity. I don't think there is any need to bring in other materials to the physical space for visual interest."

The tasteful placement of distinctive artwork, sculpture and decor from around the world punctuates the clean, uncomplicated backdrop with character and personality.

With so many inspired design choices, it may be easy to overlook an otherwise typical aspect of the home. The main staircase, with its airy mix of industrial metalwork and sturdy construction, seemingly floats. The steel stair carriage was custom crafted by Advanced Welding & Design in Woburn, and unites the upstairs and down in a sleek, streamlined fashion.

One space that's impossible to overlook is the library. It is not large, but it is unusual and interestingly expressive. The custom-fitted, open storage that holds the couples' vast collections of records, books, cassette tapes, reel-to-reel tapes and photo albums is visually impressive.

This dedicated space in the home was intentionally set just off of the

living room in an effort to keep the living space clean and free of clutter, but still steps away from the items that the family uses on a regular basis.

"It is still a space for family," the wife says. "We are a family that listens to music together; we do jigsaw puzzles and play a lot of board games. So that communal space still works the way that we lived before. It hasn't changed how we connect."



Opposite page: The family purchased an Estonia baby grand piano which is elegantly situated in the corner of the living room. The large and plentiful windows behind the piano draw the outside in making the indoor to outdoor connection ever-present. This page: The cover photo shows the family's guest room which is positioned in the far corner of the home. The angled lines and artful accents make for an interesting space that any guest would be sure to enjoy.



Left: The dining area is set between the kitchen and living space and overlooks the outside deck. The table is made by a company called Pottrona Frau and the light fixture is a low voltage, halogen chandelier made by Holtkötter. Top right: Art, sculpture and meaningful decorative accents add character to the modernist backdrop. The circular object with red trim is an industrial mold purchased from an architectural salvage company in Worcester, where the homeowners took up residence while their Boxford home was being built. The two Latvian folk-art ceramic pieces were made in the 1970s. One is a semi-mythological, nine-headed horse and the other is a figure inherited from Veita Toma, one of Latvia's foremost diaspora poets. Bottom right: A Volkswagen bus made of Legos and a limited-edition wooden streamliner car from the Swedish company Playsam add color and whimsy to the decor.



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Architect Tom Peterman



Left: A small but significant space in the home, the library was custom designed to accommodate the family's collections. Storage shelves were measured to perfectly fit each series of items. Records, cassette tapes, books and more all have a home within the library. Right: The office is on the second floor of the home, set away from the hustle and bustle of day-to-day activity. The continuation of many windows allows for inspirational workflow with no feeling of containment. Personal artwork adds warmth and energy to the space.

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