

DESIGN + DECOR

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NEW YORK



THE DESIGNER ISSUE

\$7.99 US/\$8.99 CANADA



DISPLAY UNTIL 12/21/20

BUILT TO STAND OUT

Architect Michael Moritz delivers a modern stucco masterpiece
in a sea of farmhouse façades.

Story by Nicole Davis | Photography by Brian Wetzel









An open-concept living space was of utmost importance to the homeowners. The living room, kitchen and breakfast area allow them to keep dibs on their kids from plenty of vantage points.

A couple with two young kids wanted to move out of the urban backdrop of Hoboken, NJ, and into a more suburban locale to raise their family. They purchased a lot in Westfield, NJ, just outside the city, and looked to Michael Moritz, AIA, LEED AP, and principal architect at Stonewater Architecture, to help them create the custom home of their dreams.

This project was unique from the start because the piece of land the clients chose was located on a corner lot, and the back of the home would face a golf course. This meant that the owners—who are both in the tech industry—would essentially have no neighbors. They really wanted to capitalize on this coveted level of privacy, and Michael did, too.

Also on the “must-have” list for this new build? A look that would turn heads. “The owners did not want the typical home built in Westfield,” explains Michael, “which is why they called me. You’ll see lots of Joanna Gaines, farmhouse-style homes or ‘builder specials’ here, and that’s not me—I do my own thing.”

The design concept was to give the clients a totally different style than anyone else in town. The couple pictured their very own white stucco home with black frame windows and a sleek, contemporary look and feel. Michael helped them bring this vision to life.

Just of couple of features he included are parapet walls that extend above the roof, and large windows so passersby can actually see the staircase from outside. The windows provide an amazing amount of natural



The modern yet homey kitchen is complete with a large hidden pantry behind the glass-paned door.



light throughout the home, and their appearance from the exterior of the home—with the muntin bars creating an uber-modern look—is just as impactful. In any residential project, says Michael, he tries to make the windows as large as he can. “Sometimes these homes get thick in the middle, and you get dead, dark spots without natural light,” he explains. “And in the back of this house, you get that feeling of an indoor/outdoor space because of the large windows, too.”

The back staircase of the home, which can be seen clearly from the exterior through the home’s large windows, features a stunning industrial-inspired cable rail design. Both this staircase and the entry foyer staircase are crafted from a beautiful white oak, which was chosen because it doesn’t have a red tint or as much graining.

To maximize the lot while giving the homeowners as much privacy as he could, Michael designed an approximately 7,500-square-foot L-shaped home—two stories with a basement—to block out the corner, with the inside of the L facing the golf course. The areas of the home that are used the most—the open-concept kitchen, living and breakfast spaces—are positioned here, while the office and formal dining room are on the outside of the L facing the street.

The owners were set on an open-concept living space, something they didn’t have in their Hoboken apartment.



The floor-to-ceiling windows in the office make working from home much easier on the mind.



The cable-rail staircase in the back of the house, which runs from the basement all the way to the second floor, can be seen from the street.







The light and bright master suite, completely isolated from other areas of the home, provides the perfect retreat for the owners.



And they wanted a “see-through” home, with a straight eyeshot from the foyer to the living room, and then to the backyard. Being able to watch their kids while they were sitting in the living room or cooking in the kitchen was important. This space is meant for everyday use, something that suited this family well. “No red-velvet-rope rooms here,” Michael jokes. “The living room and kitchen/breakfast area actually turned out to be my favorite area of the home. I really like the way it flows back there.”

Also situated on the first floor are an office, a full bathroom, a kid’s “hangout” space, a mudroom, a half bath and a three-car garage. The office was designed for the husband, and one thing the clients wanted for this space was lots of floor-to-ceiling glass. “This way, when the husband is working from home, it doesn’t feel like a cubicle,” Michael



says. “And even with that dark blue paint covering the whole room, this large amount of natural light comes in and brightens everything up.” Lots of built-ins in the space add functionality and keep printers and other equipment hidden from view.

Off the first floor of the home there’s plenty of entertaining space outside, making the backyard ideal for the clients’ lifestyle. Adjacent to the kids’ hangout area is a covered porch,

complete with heating lamps so the owners can sit outside and be under cover. The middle area—their outdoor sitting space—is off the family room; off the breakfast room is an outdoor grill and bar area that allows them to take the party outside.

Upstairs is the serene master suite, which may very well be the pièce de résistance of the home. Set up to be completely isolated, sharing walls with no other rooms, this second-floor



oasis provides everything the couple needs to relax. The bedroom is situated on one end of the suite, and you step out of it into a central room that Michael refers to as the dressing room, complete with a full-length mirror and seating area. Off the dressing room are entries to both the his and hers closets and the bathroom, located opposite the bedroom to minimize noise. Of note in the bathroom is a red cedar sauna room constructed inside the shower—a perfect place to decompress after a long day or a hard workout.

Especially regarding the master suite, Michael reflects that what was very nice about this project was that his vision jibed so well with that of the interior designers, which he admits doesn't always happen. "They were hired at the same time I was, and Malorie of Noa Blake Design and I really collaborated on the floor plan to make it work. She knew what kind of furniture she wanted, and I knew the space, so between the two of us, we made everything feel the right size. Nothing is too big or too small." A Goldilocks outcome, indeed.

Also located upstairs are the children's bedrooms, both of which have walk-in closets, full bathrooms and windows with benches in front of them to create those classic childhood memories. There's also a guest suite in the back, a full walk-in laundry room and a small TV room/nursery.





A side entry brings guests directly into the mudroom. "I'm not a fan of people having to go through their garage to get inside the house, so I always like having a nice side entry," Michael explains.

Michael notes that the most challenging aspect of this project—or any project, for that matter—was fitting the zoning requirements and achieving the space that the owners envisioned. "The lots are so small and there are so many restrictions, so even if the house needs 500 more square feet to make it work, you can't get it," he says. "I felt like a magician fitting everything into this space, but it turned out great."

Resources

Architect

*Michael A. Moritz
Stonewater Architecture
P.O. Box 208
Colonia, NJ 07076
908.380.2496
stonewaterarch.com*

Interior Designer

*Malorie Goldberg & Ariel Fischer
Noa Blake Design
99 N. Main Street
Marlboro, NJ 07746
732.598.2236
noablakedesign.com*