

**INSIDE: GREAT DESIGN FOR LESS**

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Chicago

# HOME

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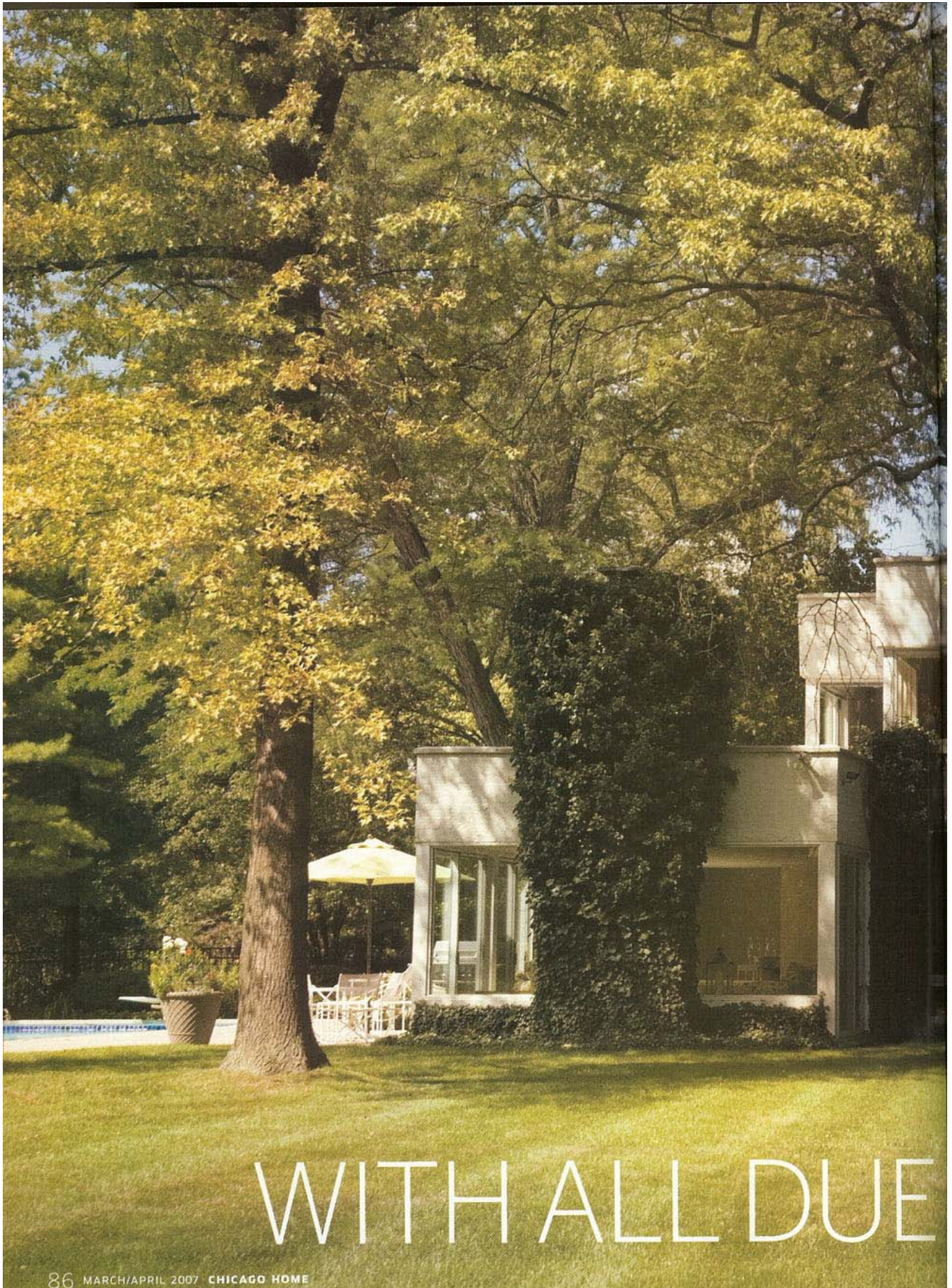
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# WITH ALL DUE



A sensitive redo turns a 1930s suburban house into a haven of contemporary comfort and style

BY ELIZABETH BLACKWELL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALAN SHORTALL

Designed 70 years ago by Nathaniel Owings, this landmark home still feels modern today. The pool (right) is a major hub of activity for the family during the summer.

RESPECT



The more you know, it seems, the harder it can be to sort through it all. Such was the dilemma faced by a Northfield couple who bought an architectural landmark: a modern house designed in 1937 by Nathaniel Owings (of the firm that became Skidmore, Owings & Merrill two years later). The wife, manager of the Summer Hill furniture and fabrics showroom at the Merchandise Mart,

was no stranger to the world of sophisticated interiors; surely, her friends assumed, she would take charge of any redecorating herself.

The answer, they quickly learned, was no. "I'm overeducated," says the woman, who is also a veteran of the furniture department at Crate & Barrel. "I'm aware of so much that's out there, and I needed someone to filter through it." That someone turned out to be interior designer Frank Ponterio, who has worked through her showroom for a number of years and whom she considers a personal friend.

"I know how these people entertain, who they entertain, what they like," Ponterio says. "The husband is big on issues of quality and craftsmanship; the wife is concerned about the design elements." Another reason to hire a professional, laughs the homeowner, was that Ponterio filled a very tricky role—as a buffer between her and her husband when they were faced with tough decisions.

Some 70 years after it was built, the home's open, inviting interiors and large windows still look current. But some of the decorating choices made over the years were not quite so timeless. Most in need of design CPR were the downstairs public rooms and the master bedroom.

"We had to de-'80s the whole house," says Ponterio. But he wanted to bring the rooms up to date without destroying the underlying structure, because, he notes, a "preservationist might want to bring the whole house back to its original look someday." For example, an original glass-block wall in the entry hall, rather than being ripped out, was covered with a sleeve of cherry wood.



A painting by Ira Yeager (represented by Summer Hill) is a colorful counterpoint to the living room's otherwise monochromatic scheme. The foyer (opposite) features a 1930s Jacques Adnet mirror.



The living room sets a tone of contemporary comfort for the rest of the home. For owners who love to entertain, the formidable David latesta coffee table serves as a center island for drinks and appetizers.





In the dining room, a picture window overlooking the yard is complemented by a similarly inviting painting by Ira Yeager. The den (opposite, top) is a cozy hideaway, made even warmer by the grasscloth covering the walls. The spa-like pool bathroom (opposite, bottom) is accessible from outside and via a "secret" door set into the bookshelves in the den.



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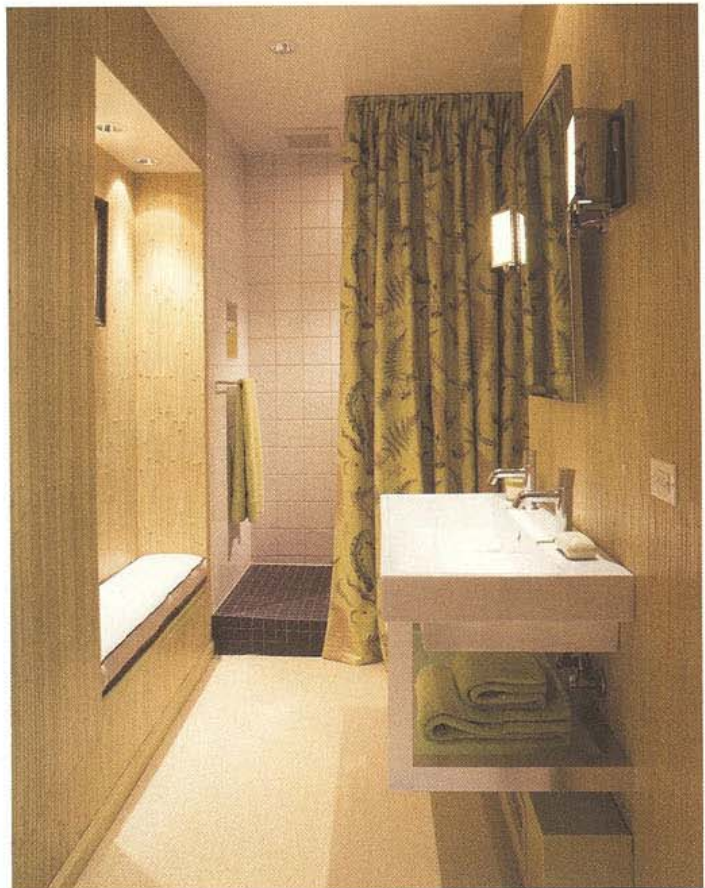


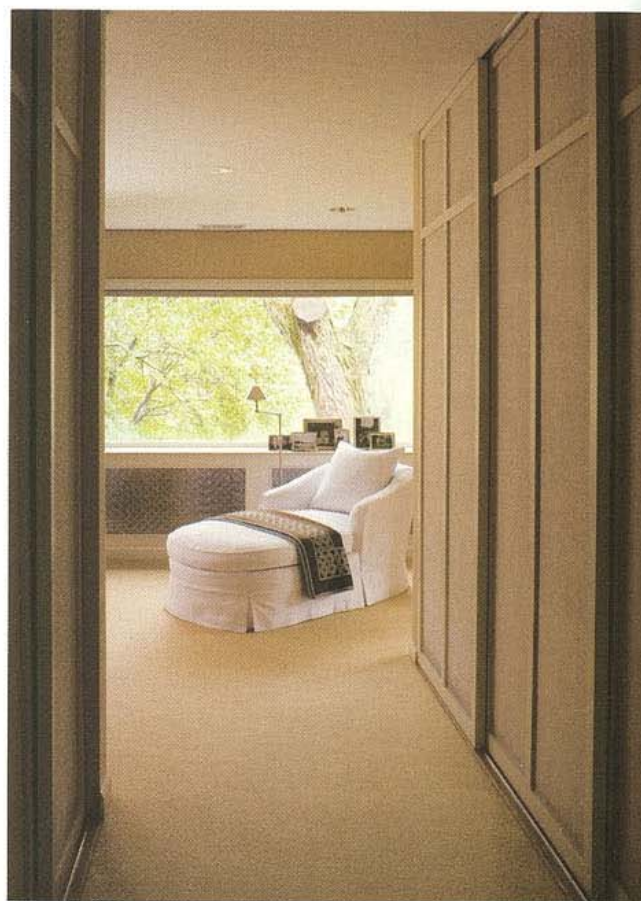
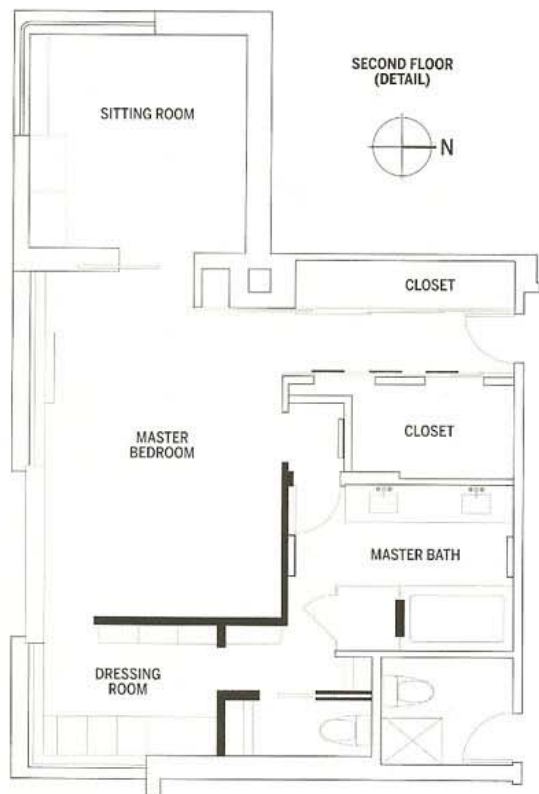
“We wanted to be respectful of the architecture and design, but we didn’t want a serious house,” says the homeowner. “We weren’t looking to fill the house with stuff.” The house also had to be kid-friendly; the wife’s eight-year-old daughter often plays with cousins who live nearby.

The result? The home’s original open feel remains, but the overall look is contemporary comfort rather than museum-like re-creation. In the living room, a custom couch and settee (covered with mohair for durability) face a massive, 5-by-6-foot coffee table by David Iatesta (carried at the Summer Hill showroom). “The client called me and said ‘Frank, are you sure you want this size?’” says Ponterio. “And what’s great about this client is that she trusted me.” The room also features a pair of original Barcelona chairs once owned by a friend of Ponterio’s.

A *Miami Vice*-style fireplace—pink granite that had been painted black and surrounded with mirrors—was replaced with a hand-cut limestone surround. Along the wall that connects the living room to the dining room, Ponterio designed cherry millwork that cleverly bridges the gap between the two rooms: the shelves facing the living room act as storage and display space, while the ones in the dining room are scaled down to the size of a buffet. “It was a way to make this huge wall part of the architecture of the room,” says Ponterio.

The home’s swimming pool and extensive lawn mean plenty of dripping, swimsuit-clad people, so for them, the pool bathroom—accessible from outside—was turned into an inviting first stop.





The original master bath, a cave-like space done in black granite and dark-stained wood, inspired the owners to go in an opposite direction for the redo (left). Outfitted with a chaise, a sunny corner in the master bedroom (above) is an ideal reading nook; a sitting room (opposite) off the same room—outfitted with a small wet bar and entertainment center—can be closed with a pocket door for quiet and privacy.

“We wanted to make it really maintenance free,” says Ponterio. A woven vinyl floor that looks like sisal accommodates all those wet feet; tough, waterproof fabric covers a recessed bench. Stained bamboo gives the walls a tropical feel. The low trough sink and adjustable tilting mirror are accessible to children as well as adults. “If you’re here on weekends in the summer, you’ve got herds of kids running through the place,” says Ponterio. “It’s fun!”

Adjacent to the pool bathroom is a more adult hide-away: a cozy den for the man of the house. The extra-deep sectional sofa accommodates his taller-than-average frame; built-in shelves behind grasscloth-and-wood-covered doors hide his stash of electronic toys. The grasscloth, which also covers the walls, enhances the room’s acoustics.

Upstairs, a sprawling master bedroom was divided into several smaller, cozier areas. Ponterio added walls to create separate sitting and dressing areas, and changed the entrance to the master bath to make it more private. Walls upholstered with beige herringbone fabric add to the sense of cocooning,





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EVERYTHING WAS SO THOUGHT-  
FULLY DONE."