



Clockwise from above: The highlight of the Neefe home is a 130-foot long, 30-foot high wall of cultured stone—nicknamed The Great Wall—that, among other things, serves as the structure's spine and hides utility work. A fountain in the cloister area comes from Santa Fe, the pebbles in the floor from Mexico. The master bathroom is designed as a liberating space, adjacent to the hot tub area. Alcoves in the wall hold the Neefes' collections of books and artworks.

Along the Great Wall

A modern marvel in Malvern blends a European-feel with Southwestern influences. All the same, the result defies categorization. As for description, just call it gorgeous.

WHEN DRS. JOHN and Lynne Neefe of Malvern decided to put the wheels in motion on their dream of living in a contemporary work of art, they knew architect William Lecky was the person to make the dream real.

Washington, D.C.-based Lecky had designed an addition for the Neefes 20 years ago, when they lived in Arlington, Virginia. The Neefes were impressed. Lecky's résumé includes accomplishments like de-

signer and architect for the Korean War Memorial, architect of record for the Vietnam Memorial and renovations at the White House, like the expansion of the Blair House (the president's guest house). "The call from the Neefes is just the kind of call that every architect loves to receive," Lecky says. "They were ideal clients. They were open to suggestions all the way around."

Lecky designed a 7,000-square-foot marvel that



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habitat

fulfilled all of the Neefes' wishes: a host of architectural surprises, an open layout, plenty of windows and continuity from the indoors to the outdoors. "I'm never going to have another window cover in my entire life," says Lynne. "I want nothing that covers the light or the outdoors."

Lecky's design was executed by Malvern's Welcome Home Builders. "People don't build houses like this around here—maybe out West, but not in this area," says co-owner Bob Birney. "It was a great collaboration between us, the client and the architect."

The highlight of the home is a 130-foot-long, 30-foot-high wall of cultured stone. It runs through the first floor, to the exterior and through the roof. "I thought the idea of the 'Great Wall' was fabulous," says Lynne. (The wall was nicknamed during construction.) A slate walkway, designed to look like a European street, runs alongside the wall. The walkway extends to an outdoor terrace. "Using the same material makes for a soft transition from the outside to the inside of the house," says Lecky. Glass at both ends admits sunlight, as do skylights over the walkway.

On the first floor, openings in the wall lead into each living area. The wall also holds alcoves and shelves where the Neefes display their artwork and books, and it camouflages ducts and piping. "It's kind of a utility spine to the house," says Lecky.

A cloister in the front of the house is another European touch. A fountain sits on one side of the room. The other side is dominated by a slate platform and pathway. Sunlight from a wall of windows and skylights warms the room. The floor is made of thousands of black pebbles from Mexico. The fountain is from Santa Fe, as are the home's hand-crafted front doors. "It's a very peaceful spot," says Lynne.

The Neefes had previously lived in a traditional house in Devon. When planning their current home, they considered their empty-nest lifestyle. They rarely used formal rooms, so they embraced an open floor plan that combines the living and dining areas. A two-way fireplace with twin 16-foot stainless steel chimney flutes is the focal point of the space. "I wanted a sculptural element to divide the dining from living area, but it still allows you to see through it and over it," says Lecky. The floor is birch with unusual blue-gray

tones that complement the stones of the wall. Eight-foot-high tie-back beams make the room's soaring ceilings appear lower, and a lamp between the beams creates an even wash of light on the wall at night.

The dining area includes a built-in china cabinet. "The idea of a built-in is a good one because the expense it saves you from buying a piece later," says Lynne. It also prevents clutter. The cabinet's granite shelf was designed to display an heirloom silver tea set.

The dining area also posed a challenge. "The architecture in the room was so strong, I didn't want to interrupt it with a chandelier. So I designed a grillwork pattern that fits in between the tie-back beams and blends into the architecture," Lecky says. The grill was made with fir slats stained to match the tie-back beams. "The light he designed is very subtle and fit in perfectly with the room," says Lynne.

The great room also houses highlights of the Neefes' eclectic art collection, including a print from 18th-century engraver Giovanni Piranesi's "Imaginary Prisons" series, a reproduction of a Frederick Remington bronze and a wood-block print from the "Nuremberg Chronicle." One wall was dedicated to a hanging sculpture of Mylar and netting called "Winter Pond" by Kentucky artist Arturo Sandoval. Its grays, pinks, and purples vary in natural and artificial light.

"The Neefes said they wanted a fountain and the sound of running water," says Lecky. So the wall of windows and glass doors in the great room looks out onto the deck and a fountain made of solid granite. The fountain overflows into a trench, then down a 14-foot waterfall to another pool below, where the water is re-circulated. "This design allows for the sound of running water on both floors," says Lecky.

Though the Neefes live mainly on the first floor, one-floor living wasn't quite enough. Lynne, impressed with the book "The Not So Big House" by Sarah Susanka, tried to adhere to its ideas. "But by the time we finished our wish list, we were out of the not-so-big-house," she says.

It was important for the Neefes to have a place for their visiting daughters. The downstairs layout thus consists of two bedroom suites with bathrooms, a family room, a theater and a pool room. Part of Lecky's philosophy is to combine embrac-

ing spaces with liberating ones. One embracing space is the outdoor hot tub area, off the master bathroom. The spacious, open bathroom is the liberating space. "The idea is to be able to move from space to space depending on your mood," says Lecky.

There were some "quirky delights" that occurred during planning, such as a window Lecky cut into Lynne's dressing area to catch sunlight from a nearby skylight. "When you look at a window from the outside during the day, it normally reads black because it's brighter outside than in," Lecky says. The Neefe home is an exception. When sun pours through the skylights and washes across the great wall, you can see in to all rooms from outside. "It was a nice little surprise," he says.

Welcome Home Builders won the Pyramid Award from the Chester County Homebuilders Association for Custom Home of the Year for the Neefes' house. "The things we pulled off with this project, we feel confident that we can build just about anything after that," says Birney. "It's such a cool and unique house." ♦