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A REVERENT RENOVATION

With a preservationist's eye, Boston architect Gary Wolf gently expands the house that modernist Henry Hoover designed for his daughter.



BY **ANDREW CAFFREY**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **GREG PREMURU**

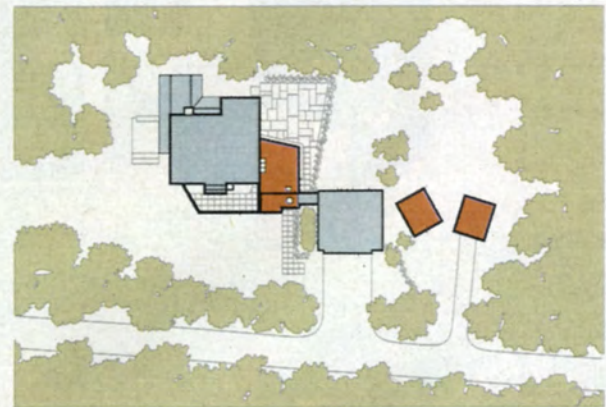
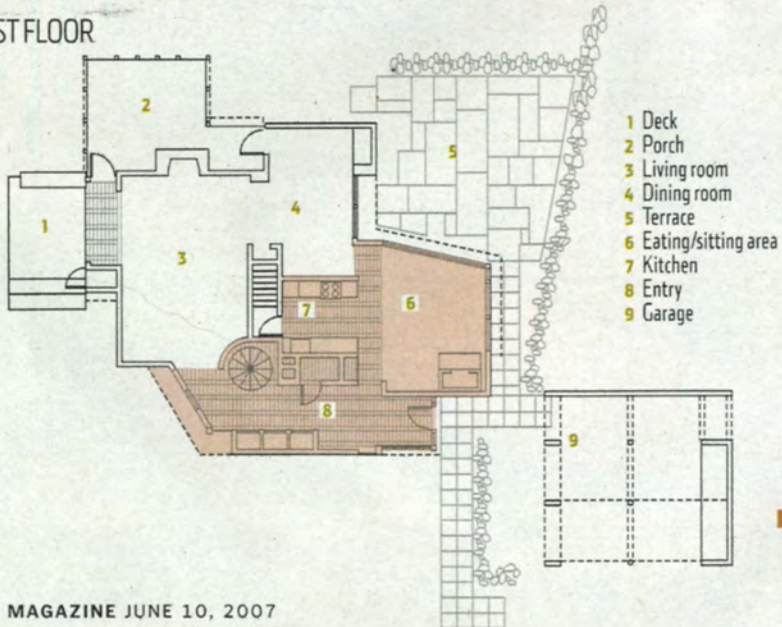
WELCOMING CHANGE
The new entry vestibule is framed in a staggered grid of textured glass panels. Facing page: The pattern is repeated in the new eating/sitting area, where sliding doors are inset with wood veneer.



PRETTY AND PRACTICAL The new room and adjacent kitchen can be closed off in winter, when the fireplace easily heats the space. Facing page, from top: The view to the gardens and the woods beyond; architect Gary Wolf (center) with Lucretia and Paul Giese on the back porch, where Hoover's original grid pattern inspired repetition.



FIRST FLOOR



■ NEW CONSTRUCTION

T WOULD BE A DELICATE ASSIGNMENT:

Update a house designed by a pioneering modernist whose work you're helping preserve. Being too respectful risks mimicry; too bold upstages the master.

The client is a friend to boot, and most important, she is the daughter of the modernist architect and understandably nervous that she might be commissioning an undoing of her father's hand.

So, of course, Boston architect Gary Wolf jumped at the chance.

Wolf shares a friendship with Lucretia and Paul Giese and a reverence for the work of her father, Henry Hoover, who before his death in 1989 produced dozens of homes in Boston's western suburbs, including Lincoln, where he lived and where he redesigned this house for his daughter and son-in-law. "My challenge," says Wolf, "was to design an addition that fit on the house and still had some of its own identity, so someone who was thoughtful and perceptive could see where Hoover ended and Wolf began."

Hoover and Wolf dipped into the same architectural well. In general, both insisted that built structures be part of, not on top of, the landscapes they occupy. Specifically, both used designs that more fully nest the Giese home in its natural setting.

That relationship with nature extends to materials: woods finished to their natural best, earthy tiles and stone, and always glass, for the views. They also deployed clear lines and mildly intricate geometry to create the familiar rectangular patterns of modernism.

The stage for the Giese home is a saddle in heavily wooded land that angles sharply upward to a ridgeline. It's a stunningly beautiful site, and anything more obviously plonked onto the landscape would have been an insult.

The home was just a small, unassuming wooden box when Hoover was helping the Gieses house hunt in the early '70s. "I can do something with it," Lucretia remembers her father telling them.

And so he did. Hoover was "spatially clever," she says, and within the house's tight confines and the Gieses' tight budget, the architect added critical space - dining room, kitchen, foyer, screened porch, and carport. An important flourish was the addition of a spiral staircase, with a curving wall separating it from the living room.

He also unmistakably dressed the house in modernist clothes, juxtaposing vertical stripes of new pine clapboard below the original cedar boards, which are wrapped horizontally around the top of the house.

As they approached retirement three decades later, the Gieses, planning on spending more time at home, wanted more space: a bigger kitchen, with more light and improved circulation; they also wanted a bathroom on the first floor. But they were reluctant to tinker with "Daddy's" work.

"We didn't know how we could do that without destroying what my father had done," Lu-



■■■■
ARCHITECT

Gary Wolf Architects Inc.,
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SEAMLESS Wolf successfully expanded the entry by creating a light-filled vestibule. The old and new spaces share a tile floor. The spiral staircase was a flourish added by Henry Hoover.

SAVING THE CLASSICS

Given modern architecture's deep roots in Massachusetts, it's only natural that it has its own local preservation group. The New England chapter of Docomomo, the worldwide organization dedicated to preserving modernist masterpieces, is some three dozen members strong and has its hands full trying to prevent many unique and classic structures from being torn down and replaced.

"One of the primary parts of our mission is front-line advocacy," says chapter president David Fixler, an architect who lives in a Henry Hoover-designed home in Weston. The group has been successful in finding sympathetic buyers for some modern homes that were for sale, but there have been losses: The Rachel Raymond house in Belmont, considered the first true modernist house in New England, for example, was demolished in 2006.

But it's not a just-say-no crowd. In addition to hosting tours and lectures, the group helps owners learn more about their houses, guiding them to background information and ways to update their properties that are sensitive to the original design. "They can be comfortably and sympathetically adapted to suit today's lifestyle," says Fixler. "Let's not freeze these houses in amber."

Many notable houses are located in the western suburbs, where other groups, such as Friends of Modern Architecture in Lincoln, are also helping.

Docomomo/US-New England may be now tackling its toughest job: preserving Boston City Hall. It's a controversial building, but Fixler says Mayor Tom Menino's public dislike for it – he wants to relocate city government to new digs on the waterfront – has galvanized the preservation community. "All of a sudden, people are beginning to grab onto the fact we have this huge modernist legacy" that is worth preserving, he says.



'My challenge,' says Wolf, 'was to **design an addition that fit on the house and still had some of its own identity**, so someone who was thoughtful and perceptive could see where Hoover ended and Wolf began.'



HOME IMPROVEMENT From left: The house the Gieses purchased more than 30 years ago was a small, unassuming box; Henry Hoover transformed it in 1974 with a modernist's eye, which served the couple well until they decided to expand; the newly renovated house brings sympathetic sensibilities to Hoover's original design.



SITE LINES The addition is a simple glass box that extends into an expanded granite-slab terrace that is outlined with stone walls. For entertaining, there is easy access for guests from the portico that connects the garage to the front entry. Several trees were removed to improve the views.

Lucretia says. “And it took us a long time to realize that we could find an architect who could understand our needs and be sympathetic to the existing fabric of the house.”

Wolf – a friend through his wife, who, like Lucretia Giese, is an art historian – has the bona fides, which include work in the New England chapter of Docomomo/US, which seeks to preserve modernist structures.

The one major expansion was the addition of an eating and sitting area adjacent to the renovated kitchen, which now has a classically modern look. New cabinets are finished in quarter-sawn curly-maple veneer. The island is topped in soapstone, inspired by the soapstone countertop Hoover designed in the master bath. Soapstone also is used around the room’s new fireplace, which Paul, a retired management consultant and avid woodsman, keeps well stocked with firewood.

The showstopper is the set of sliding glass doors Wolf designed to pull across the south-facing windows to temper the sunlight that sometimes floods the room. The screening comes from paper-thin strips of wood veneer set inside the windowpanes; when the sun is

just right, the wood takes on a luminescent glow. Wolf drew inspiration from recessed panels Hoover had designed in his own home, which is now occupied by Lucretia’s brother, Henry Hoover Jr.

Wolf also added a vestibule to the entryway. Floor tiles are fittingly organic – a warm heather brown with irregular coloration. On the exterior wall, panels of textured glass lend privacy to the space but can pleasantly distort the afternoon sunlight so that it almost shimmers.

Here again, Wolf and Hoover moved in step. The glass and window muntins are arranged in rectangles of different sizes that give the surface a “dynamism and movement” that a standard straight grid would not, says Wolf.

One personal challenge Wolf assigned himself was liberating the curved wall in the living room, which in a “poetic example” of the modernist principle of form following function, was designed to fit around the curving staircase behind it. The Gieses had placed an antique buffet, inherited from an aunt, in a corner where the curve met a straight plane. It didn’t belong there; they all knew it. But in such a small house, there was no place else for

it. So Wolf designed a pocket-sized addition to the dining room just for auntie’s handsome hand-me-down.

The changes outside are bracing. First, a large oak tree growing hard against the carport was removed, expanding the view through the breezeway to the back patio area, where Wolf expanded the terrace with slabs of granite. A towering pine and several other trees were removed to open up the prospect of the wide slope beyond.

Wolf added a circular skylight in the roof above the front door to emphasize the point of arrival. The most playful additions are two small storage sheds on the other side of the carport, each shaped and placed to continue the line and form of the existing buildings.

Even her father would not have thought of adding the sheds, says Lucretia, but, she adds, they would have had his blessing. Indeed, she believes he would have approved of all the changes. “I would have loved for him to have seen it.” ■

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