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Frames of Reference

A sidelong nod to the midcentury box gives a Virginia home with a striking wall of windows its name.

Eunnice Eun stands in the double-height living area of the McLean, Virginia, home she shares with her husband, Patrick Kim, and their two children. The expanses of glass echo and update the large windows of the 1961 house they demolished to build this one.



Eunnice Eun and Patrick Kim had talked about building a new home for nearly as long as they'd been married. But after almost two decades of envisioning, plotting, and thumbing through nerdy architecture magazines, they were prompted to turn their long-nursed dreams into reality by a serendipitous excursion—and a minor calamity.

It began with a drive through their hometown of McLean, Virginia. As they wound through one of the many heavily wooded neighborhoods in the Washington, D.C., suburb, they spotted a shiny rectilinear house in a quiet pocket of town. “Eunnice was like, ‘Stop the car! Stop the car!’” Patrick recalls. Though the residence had a boxy form, it also had walls of glass that allowed the forest views to penetrate, softening it and creating a fluid connection between the living spaces and the surrounding landscape. The couple tracked down the architects—Eric Höweler and Meejin Yoon of Boston-based Höweler + Yoon—and sent them an email: “We saw your house. We love it. It’s so full of ideas and we’d like to talk sometime.”

At the time, Eunnice and Patrick and their children—Milo, now 10, and Clara, 8—were living in a small, midcentury house that they planned one day to replace. They had bought it from a pair of retirees who loved its daring-for-its-time double-height living room and its strong tie to the outdoors. Eunnice and

Patrick were upfront about their desire to eventually build something of their own on the site, but they reassured the couple they wouldn't veer too far from the original home's plan. “We promised to keep the spirit of the house,” says Eunnice.

The family lived in the house for several years, contemplating what exactly their new residence might look like. After meetings with Höweler and Yoon in both Boston and McLean (also home to Yoon's family, as it turns out), conversations were proceeding at a leisurely pace. Then, suddenly, disaster struck. “Our house basically kicked us out,” Eunnice says. The flat roof had an undetected leak that had been growing year by year, and the double-height ceiling collapsed. Thankfully, no one was hurt, but the family had to evacuate, and the need to act quickly on a new build became abundantly clear.

Immediately, the architects and the couple got to work on finalizing the design. They had already settled on preserving the central idea of the old one, but they wanted to add space and improve the home's orientation to the woods of the adjacent Langley Fork Park.

After many tries and model constructions, the winning concept was of two L-shaped volumes, with the crooks of the L's stacked one atop the other. But instead of being rigidly rectilinear, the shapes taper a bit and have few right angles, inspiring the >

“There are no right angles in the house—something we came to regret when we started construction.”

ERIC HÖWELER, ARCHITECT



Designed by architects Eric Höweler and Meejin Yoon, the home centers on a soaring living/dining area with warm walnut flooring and large glass walls from Western Window Systems (opposite). Slim pendants from Vibia hang above a

Saarinen dining table from Knoll and Cherner chairs. The family shares some quiet time together on a Thataway Angled sectional and around a Bumper XL ottoman, both from Blu Dot (this page). The Waldor rug from Feizy recalls a forest floor.

“We told Eric and Meejin we wanted the house to be highly conceptual. They got it right away.”

PATRICK KIM, RESIDENT



The second-story bedroom wing faces east, toward the warmth of the morning sun and away from neighbors. The property includes about an acre of woods and sits at the

edge of federal parkland. “Looking out these windows, your view just extends forever,” says Eunnice. Beneath the bedrooms, a secondary living area serves as a poolhouse.



In the couple's bedroom (above), a Nook upholstered platform bed from Blu Dot is flanked by C Shape end tables

from Yamazaki Home. Eunnice was opposed to the architects' idea of a black exterior, so they compromised on a graphite gray

cladding complemented by red cedar infill panels (opposite). The understated landscape design is by Gregg Bleam.

• **Oblique House** N

ARCHITECT **Höweler + Yoon** LOCATION **McLean, Virginia**



cleverly Dickensian name: Oblique House. “We wanted it to be forward-looking, not backward-looking,” says Patrick. “There was this kind of ‘aha!’ moment when Eric and Meejin came up with the interlocking L’s.”

The new design re-creates the original house’s soaring living room, which remains the central pivot point, with new wings that angle off into obliquely shaped private spaces. The overall effect is dramatically off-kilter. “I drew a two-story volume, which was what they loved about their old house, and said we can keep the volume and change the house,” says Höweler. “I called it a spatial citation. We were quoting the original structure.”

Eunnice’s personal requirements were, in a way, harder to nail. “For me, it was about a feeling,” she says. “We loved the way the old house lived. We wanted the feel of that house, even though the new house would be different in style and scale.” Still, she was concerned that the house might feel cold. “Eunnice specifically said, ‘I don’t want to live in a sterile house,’” Höweler recalls. “We went with walnut floors and red cedar infill panels on the facade to warm it up, and we used Richlite on the exterior, which is an alternative to cement board, with a deep charcoal color, almost like a lead pencil.”

Both Eunnice, an attorney, and Patrick, who works in private equity, sought another architectural intangible for their dream home: They wanted a sense of peace, a refuge from their D.C. careers and pressures. In the end, their new home is daring, but it also feels cozy, peaceful, and connected. The soaring space links to the trees outside, taking on an almost temple-like quality. “It’s the clean lines, the minimalism, the outdoors being indoors,” Patrick says, ticking off his favorite things about the new house. “There’s a sense of Zen in here.” ■

ILLUSTRATION: LOHNES + WRIGHT

