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The Right Blend

This Greensburg home blends beauty, ingenuity, and family ties to create a picture-perfect setting

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Architecture lends itself to many possibilities. Some structures are even able to transcend the blueprint and take on lives of their own.

Situated on a hillside in the wooded valleys of Greensburg, Pennsylvania, Patty and Greg Keller live in just such a dwelling. Originally sited, designed, and built by Patty's brother Tim Pappalardo, the home is a blend of beauty, ingenuity, and family ties. When Greg and Pat-



① Greg and Patty Keller—relaxing in a designer chair of black leather and beautiful wood veneer.

② Glass is an important component because it reflects the natural beauty that surrounds the home on all sides.

ty decided to add to the original structure, they did so with the help of a talented architect and a dedicated builder.

Architect Lee Calisti, AIA, the principal at lee CALISTI architecture + design, first met the Kellers during an interview process, which found him hired on the spot. As an adjunct professor of architecture at Carnegie Mellon University, Calisti stays fresh by trying to address the same design challenges he presents to his students.

The Kellers needed to personalize the original structure and add new living quarters. Their plans included streamlining the existing spaces into a comfortable geometric precision and creating a pronounced main entry. Then, they doubled the square footage with the addition of a decidedly modern, three-story cube.

Calisti admits it was a challenge because the original structure had such purity of form. "It was a low-sloped roof shed. How do you attach to something like that in a meaningful way?" he says, before answering his own question.

"One of the things that struck me was the view to the south. The original house faced this view, and there is a lot of glass on that side. Just



⌚ Hardwood ceilings and flooring, and leather, suede, and corduroy fabrics add splashes of color to give the room a natural beauty.

⌚ Patty's brother, Dan Pappalardo, painted this scene. It hangs on the wall behind the staircase, which accesses each of the home's three new levels.



⌚ The windows are open to the surrounding views, and Patty considers them “photographs” of beautiful woods.

⌚ From the existing structure, the kitchen and dining room were redesigned for simple efficiency. IKEA lanterns add a whimsical touch above the modern Amish dining table and Swedish museum chairs.

standing there, I felt the house telling me where it wanted to be.”

An 8-foot-wide glass “link” became the meeting place between old and new and also solved the problem of an inauspicious entry. Now, the entry is clearly marked.

The addition has a lower-level basement, a master suite on the main level, and a third level that functions as a music and guest room. Originally, Greg envisioned a turret-style tower room, but Calisti recommended going beyond the literal interpretation. “I wanted to give him a space that was useable, but not so story-book like,” he explains. “The tower becomes less iconic and, instead, becomes this big, big window.”

Greg couldn’t be happier with the results. Guitars are mounted onto the reinforced plaster walls, and a drum set awaits an inspired beat. The plush carpeting creates an acoustic barrier, and the room doubles as a place for his granddaughter’s overnight visits.

In the original structure, the kitchen and dining room were gut-



ted, so there was virtually nothing left. Only the load-bearing walls and columns remained; and the rooms were rebuilt from the same footprint, with a more spacious layout. The bedroom became a home office. A bathroom became a powder room. The pantry was absorbed into the new hallway.

Calisti is passionate about making sure every square foot is valued for its contribution to the whole. His design of the new master suite, for example, offers insights to his approach. A long hallway becomes

➡ Painting one wall a rich brown adds a subtle intimacy to the master bedroom.

⬇️ At the end of this “dressing foyer,” the master suite makes a sharp turn. The unique design makes the room accessible, yet very private.



➡ A combination of different woods gives the home a kind of modern-cottage sensibility.

a dressing room with side-by-side closets instead of walk-ins. “I gave them the same amount of hanging space with less square footage,” he says of this streamlined design.

The interiors honor the surrounding landscape and offer a “Zen-like” sanctuary. Patty considers the aesthetic “natural more than modern” and treats the windows like huge photographs. The walls are painted with Glass of Milk. And the wood floors, ceilings, and trim are a combination of cedar, cherry, birch, and maple. Stainless steel is used as an accent in everything, from kitchen drawer pulls to light fixtures.

As members of the family businesses—The Back Porch Restaurant, Speers Street Grill, and Two Fine Caterers—Greg and Patty put special care into the newly designed kitchen. “One of the reasons we like



the simple look is that our restaurant is historical (built in 1806), so this feels really fresh and new,” explains Patty. There are no overhead cabinets, and all the storage is below waist level. The windows and the views take precedence over traditional kitchen design, and the room flows wide instead of tall.

Patty considers the aesthetic “natural more than modern” and treats the windows like huge photographs.

One thing that is definitely missing from the home’s construction is the tension between architect, homeowner, and contractor. John Brodine of Brodine Construction in Monongahela did the work, and both the Kellers and Calisti agree that his insights were invaluable. “John is one of the best builders I’ve ever worked with,” says Calisti.

The weekly meetings between the three parties were above and beyond the expectations of a builder, and both the architect and the homeowners were grateful for Brodine’s committed approach.

Surrounded by 2 acres of woods and overlooking a horse pasture, the setting is as important as the home itself. Calisti calls it an outward-looking home, and the Kellers agree. Patty explains, “You’re always looking outside, and all you see is this natural beauty.” ■