



Warm Embrace

A design team conceives a new home with timeless appeal on the shores of the South River

Text by Sharon Jaffe Dan | Exterior photography by Kevin Weber | Interior photography by Geoffrey Hodgdon



Previous spread: A breezeway connects the main residence and garage, which doubles as a pool house. The gabled entrance (above) opens to the foyer (top), where blue Arteriors lamps grace a Century console. A wood-beamed ceiling crowns the great room (opposite); Erin Paige Pitts designed the seating and animated the shelves with Holland & Sherry wall covering.

Though it's a quick drive or motorboat jaunt from the heart of Annapolis, a three-and-a-half-acre wooded parcel with its own strip of beach on the South River feels far removed from the bustle of Maryland's capital. Tami and Rick Matson discovered the gem on their search for a new home near the bay. For years, they'd spent laid-back weekends in a small getaway they'd owned in Edgewater, less than an hour's drive from their Gaithersburg residence. When the youngest of their four kids went off to college, the Matsons decided to trade both homes for permanent digs on the shore.

"You hit the point when you're ready for the next journey," says Tami, a homemaker. "We loved coming to the Annapolis area on weekends and thought it would make a great spot to live." She and Rick, who owns a commercial-construction company, envisioned a retreat large enough to host the kids and their future families with ease.

Architecture: Leo Wilson, AIA, LEED AP, principal; Sandie Martino, project architect, Hammond Wilson, Annapolis, Maryland. Interior Design: Erin Paige Pitts, Erin Paige Pitts Interiors, Annapolis, Maryland. Builder: Matt Long and Todd Soroka, Gate One Builders, Annapolis, Maryland. Landscape Contractor: Mark Childs, Exterior Image, Lothian, Maryland.



Both were “blown away” at first sight by the Saunders Point property, complete with swaths of woods and lawn, a pool and views of the South River and Crab Creek. “I could see one of our kids getting married on the lawn someday,” muses Tami.

There was also a 1970s Acorn Deck house on-site. Initially, the couple spent time in the “cool” but outdated prefab, getting to know the lay of the land. But it soon became clear that to create the retreat they wanted, they’d have to start from scratch. So the owners tapped architects Leo Wilson and Sandie Martino of Hammond Wilson, interior designer Erin Paige Pitts and Gate One Builders to make their dream a reality.

The Matsons have long admired the Shingle-style dwellings of Rhode Island, where Rick’s sister lives. After detailed discussions, the architects homed in on timeless New England vernacular. “We were aware that this is not a beach house or even a bay house,” notes Tami. “Instead, we wanted to capture the feeling of a river house with a darker exterior—not stark white.”

Factoring in critical-area setbacks and the pool (which was staying put), the architects situated the new house on nearly the same footprint as its predecessor. This move not only took advantage of the best vistas, but also preserved mature trees and gardens during construction. Once the existing house came down, materials were donated for reuse.



The dining room (left) links the great room and kitchen. A Visual Comfort chandelier makes a statement above the table surrounded by Sherrill Furniture chairs. Pitts designed kitchen cabinetry with a timeless furniture look (pictured here), from a curvy blue island to tailored wooden units in each corner. Foxcraft fabricated the cabinets and Atlas Stone provided the countertops.



“With its existing gardens and mature trees, it feels like the house has been here forever.” —SANDIE MARTINO



The residence revolves around leisure pursuits all year round. In the great room (opposite), a custom puzzle table by Baltimore artisan Mitchell Yanosky and Lee Industries poufs enjoy the river vista, framed by Cowtan & Tout draperies. Outdoors, the three-and-a-half-acre property features (top, left to right) a sandy beach near the dock and a fire pit in the woods. The architects ensured water views took center stage in almost every room, including the screened porch (above), sporting a Palecek sofa and Momeni rug.

The completed residence is organized as two separate structures—a main house and a three-car garage—connected by an open breezeway. “I’m so happy with the way the house landed,” says Martino, the project architect. “When you come around the drive, the breezeway frames views of the pool and the water.”

The foyer opens to a double-height great room—one of Tami Matson’s must-haves—with a dining room, kitchen and screened porch to the left and the owners’ suite and an office on the right. There is a bedroom for their youngest daughter plus two guest bedrooms on the second floor, while a full apartment over the garage is ready for extended stays. The above-ground lower level revolves around play time with a billiards table and bar, a gym and an inviting lounge.

Careful massing downplays the size of the 7,565-square-foot dwelling from the front. “We took advantage of space under the roof for the second floor,” say Martino. “This allows the home to come down in scale and makes it warmer and more approachable.”

Warmth and approachability, along with a dash of casual elegance, drove the interior plan—starting in the great room, dining area and kitchen, all aligned along the rear. The palette was inspired by St. Moritz marble that rims the great room fireplace and tops the kitchen island. “With its soft grays and blues, the stone looks like the sky with floating clouds,” designer Erin Paige Pitts observes.

An oversized hearth grounds the airy great room. “We typically sway clients away from double-height volumes because they take up square footage, but there’s something beautiful about this one,” says Martino. “Erin added the wood-beamed ceiling, which makes the room feel so comfortable.” Custom sofas dressed in nubby fabrics encourage guests to linger.

With its curvy, blue-gray island and tall walnut cabinets, there is nothing cookie-cutter about the kitchen. Pitts carefully detailed the space, from the Lunada Bay backsplash tile to the diamond motif on the cabinet fronts. “We tried to make it feel less like a brand new, all-white kitchen with a mix of cabinetry and furniture pieces,” she says.

Wilson and Martino ensured that residents and guests could gaze out to the river from practically every room; myriad window seats, also favored by the family dog, offer intimate vantage points.

During warmer months, everyone heads outdoors. The garage doubles as a pool house, harboring a guest bath and an al fresco kitchen; parties can also meander down to the beach and dock or to a woody fire pit for gatherings after dark. “This is one of those projects that has all the pieces everyone wants—trees, a beach, a pier, a front lawn,” marvels Martino. “With its existing gardens and mature trees, it feels like the house has been here forever.”

The Matsons, who moved in during the summer of 2020, couldn’t be happier. “I feel very connected to nature here,” reflects Tami, “and we have an amazing sunset every day.

“I wanted a home that would age well,” she continues. “We’d like to see this house be here for years and years past us.” ↓



Schumacher wallpaper embellishes a vestibule (above) leading into the owners’ suite. The bedroom (opposite) features a Bernhardt bureau and Romo drapes. Pitts channeled a spa-like ambiance in the bath (below) with a floor motif of her own design and wallpaper by Annapolis artisan Victoria Larson.

