

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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## THE POWER OF DESIGN

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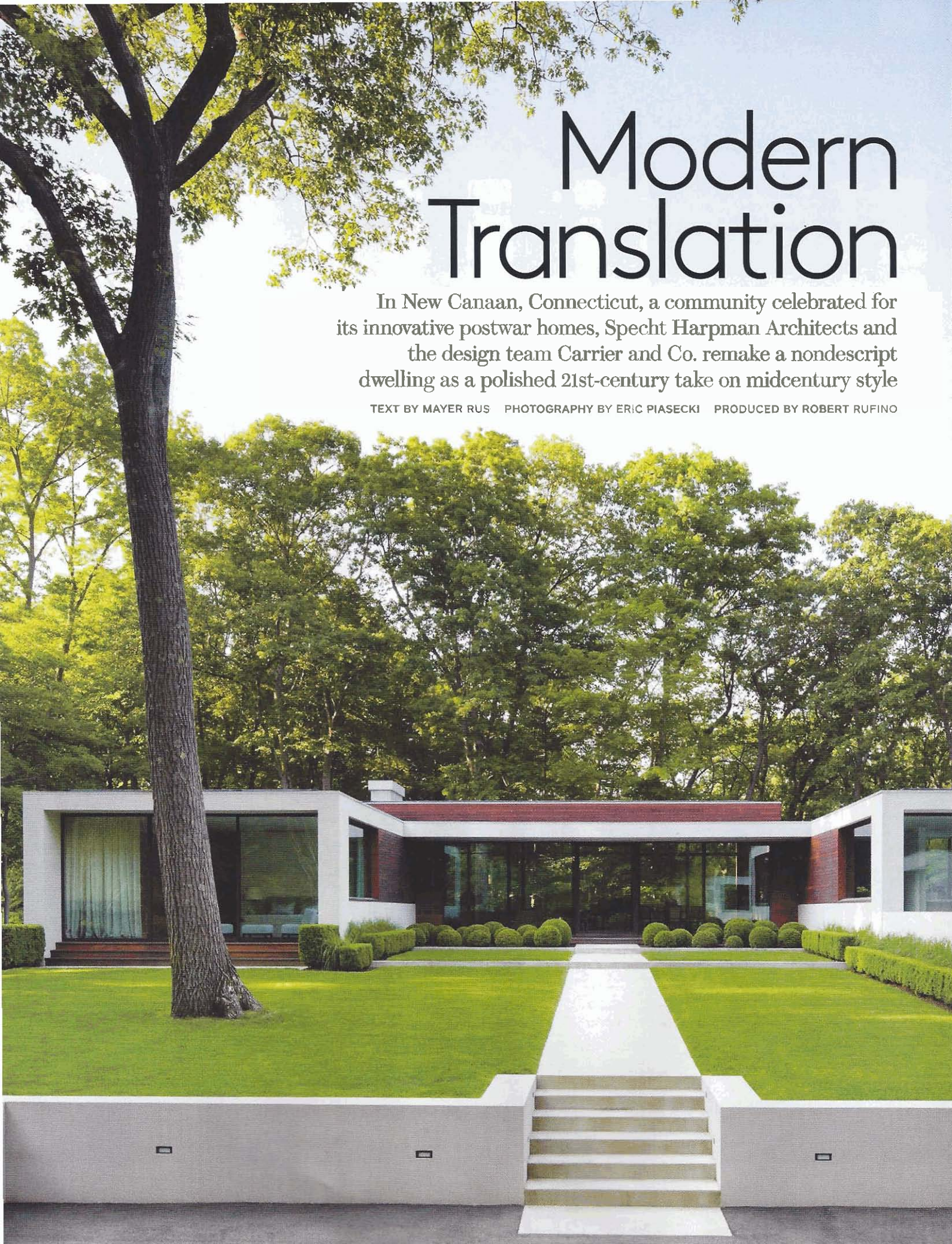




# Modern Translation

In New Canaan, Connecticut, a community celebrated for its innovative postwar homes, Specht Harpman Architects and the design team Carrier and Co. remake a nondescript dwelling as a polished 21st-century take on midcentury style

TEXT BY MAYER RUS PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC PIASECKI PRODUCED BY ROBERT RUFINO







**Left:** Specht Harpman Architects created a sleek, light-filled home for New Canaan, Connecticut, marketing executives Avery and Nada Stirratt (top right); the house, which Carrier and Co. Interiors outfitted with complementary furnishings and fixtures, affords abundant views of its wooded setting. **Above:** Lounge chairs from Gandia Blasco overlook the pool. For details see Sources.





For aficionados of modern architecture, New Canaan, Connecticut, is like Mecca, Lourdes, and Colonial Williamsburg all rolled into one glorious sylvan suburb. In addition to Philip Johnson's Glass House—arguably the most famous modern dwelling in the world—the town boasts a stunning array of residential work by Marcel Breuer, John Johansen, Eliot Noyes, and other luminaries of 20th-century architecture. Yet when marketing executives Nada and Avery Stirratt decided to renovate their own New Canaan home, they weren't contemplating an homage to the region's fertile design history. They really just wanted a new kitchen.

"This started off as a small project, but the kitchen discussion led to conversations about a flat roof, and then we began talking about ambitious interior renovations. Eventually we decided to tear the house down and start fresh," recalls Scott

Specht of Specht Harpman Architects, a New York- and Austin, Texas-based firm known for its ultraclean structures and judicious use of space. "Nada and Avery don't do things by halves. They became deeply invested in every aspect of the process."

Architect Louise Harpman, Specht's partner, describes the original building as a nondescript midcentury home buried under an agglomeration of additions spanning from the 1960s through the '80s. "We wondered if there was a Breuer or Noyes house hidden beneath all the renovations, but sadly there wasn't," Harpman says. "We had to rethink the lexicon of classic modern houses and update it for these particular clients and for this moment in time."

Fortunately, the Stirratts' vision of domestic bliss dovetailed nicely with basic modernist hallmarks such as an open plan and glass curtain walls. "I always wanted to live in a loft, and Avery





*Clockwise from above:* A pair of cube chairs by Desiron face the living area's floor-to-ceiling windows. The dining area features Mattaliano side chairs and a table by Rose Tarlow Melrose House, with a Bourgeois Bohème light fixture hanging above. Caesarstone counters are installed in the kitchen; the stools are by Dune. *Opposite:* In the living area, a Warren Platner table for Knoll from Design Within Reach is grouped with a daybed from Ralph Pucci International covered in a Castei fabric from Donghia and a custom-made ottoman clad in a Kravet fabric; the rug is by Beauvais Carpets.

always wanted to live outdoors," Nada says. "We selected this property specifically because of the trees and the privacy."

Working within the original U-shaped footprint, the architects conceived the new three-bedroom house as a taut, rectilinear white stucco pavilion, tucked discreetly into the landscape and accented with contrasting *ipe*-wood architectural details (decks, stairs, and window casings) that gesture to the forested setting. Two wings—one containing the master bedroom suite and the other a home gym—are connected to the central living/dining area on the main level, with an office, media room, and library on the floor below.

"We spent a lot of time thinking about circulation and ways to provide different paths in, out, and through the house," says Amy Lopez-Cepero, the project architect from Specht Harpman. "The clients entertain constantly, so the plan had to work for







parties as well as for the times when Avery and Nada are there alone. There's a sense of surprise and discovery as you move through the various social and private spaces." One of those discoveries is a cloistered outdoor lounge area the Stirratts have christened the Lower East Side, a nod to its placement on the property and its affinity with the trendy Manhattan neighborhood of hip restaurants, cocktail bars, and art galleries. "It's the perfect place for parties—and we love a good party," Nada says. "The police have only had to come twice!"

The husband-and-wife team of Jesse Carrier and Mara Miller, who head the New York firm Carrier and Co. Interiors, worked to add a degree of softness and warmth to the home while maintaining the integrity of Specht Harpman's spare, planar volumes. "Our marching orders were to stay within a strictly limited color palette of grays, whites, and chocolate, and to avoid

anything overtly decorative," Carrier explains. To that end, the designers mixed stalwart modern furniture by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Verner Panton, and Eero Saarinen with contemporary furnishings—including a number of custom-made pieces—sympathetic to the overall ethos of restraint and refinement. "We had to fight for things like the hand-dyed linen curtains and the carpet in the master bedroom. Getting permission for the purple ottoman downstairs was our crowning achievement," Miller jokes.

"I haven't had wall-to-wall carpeting since I was a kid," says Nada, sounding slightly shocked that it has reentered her life. "Jesse and Mara insisted that the carpet and the curtains would make it feel like we were waking up in a luxurious cocoon. They were absolutely right."

The collaborative spirit of the design team emerges in the seamless fusion of structure, decor, and the crisply tailored

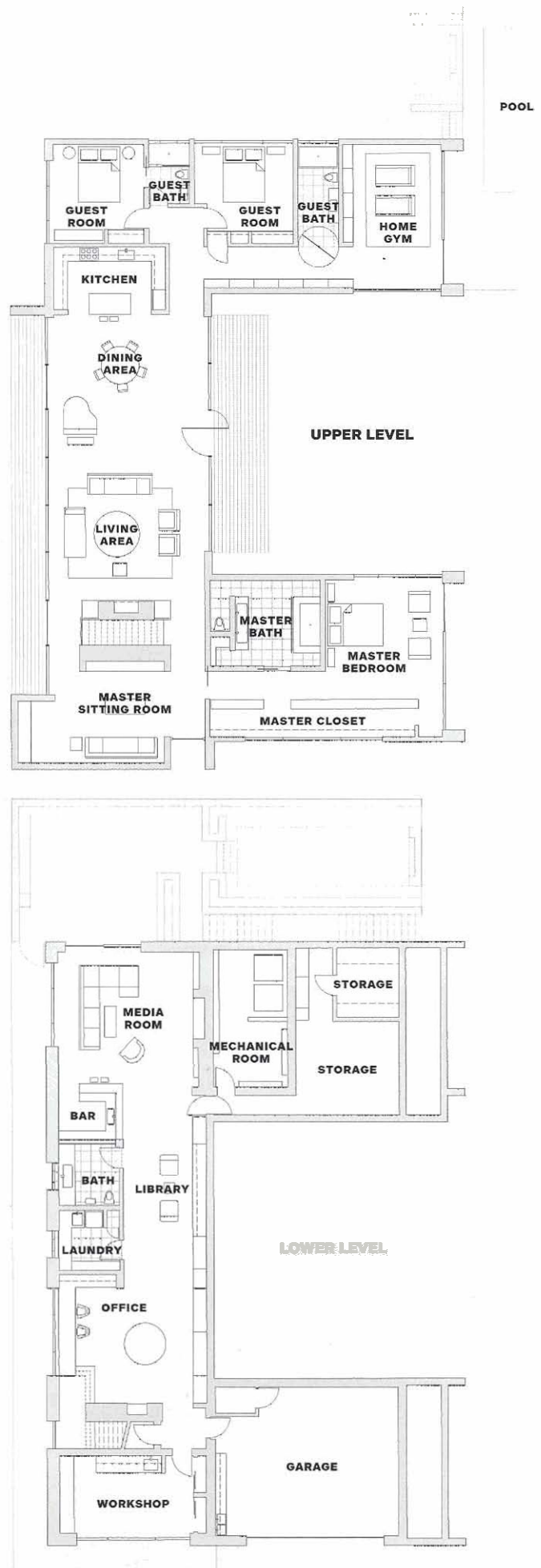




*Above:* An ottoman by B&B Italia sits beside the office's fireplace.  
*Opposite:* In the media room, a cocktail table by Bright Chair Co. is positioned between a B&B Italia swivel chair and a sectional sofa by Minotti from DDC; the carpet is by Calvin Klein Home.

grounds by Alec Gunn and Heather Morgan of Gunn Landscape Architecture, who worked with Specht Harpman from the earliest planning stages. Broad expanses of glass treat the inhabitants and their guests to an ever-changing view of natural splendor as the abundant deciduous trees perform their seasonal magic. It's the best show in town. "We wanted the outside to be the star," notes Avery. "And it is."

Beyond the kudos of their grateful clients, the team received the ultimate honor when the Stirratts' residence was the only contemporary house to be selected for the New Canaan Historical Society's annual tour of distinguished modern homes. Perhaps the most eloquent summary of this project comes courtesy of a quotation attributed to Fred Astaire that is inscribed on the bespoke aluminum ballet barre in the home's gym: "Do it big, do it right, and do it with style." □







**Clockwise from above:** Nickel sconces by Casella Lighting frame the window in the downstairs bath; the sink fittings are by Hansgrohe, and the wall and floor tiles are from Stone Source. A guest room is accented with throw pillows from Room & Board. The sink in a guest bath is by Lacava from AF Supply, and the shower fittings are by Kohler; the wall and floor tiles are by Ann Sacks. In the master bath, a Christophe Pillet bench from DDC joins a vintage mercury-glass vase from Lillian August; the tiles are from Stone Source, and the shower fittings are by Dombracht. **Opposite:** The master bedroom's walls are sheathed with customized MDF panels; the slipper chairs are by Christian Liaigre.

