

INTERIOR DESIGN®

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well beings



the path to perfection

text: jane margolies
photography: peter aaron/otto

BarlisWedlick reinvents a modernist landmark in suburban New York as a private wellness retreat



Around noon on a Friday, Jonathan Miller pulls up to his 27-acre lakeside property in Armonk, New York. A media executive who headed AOL, Miller just flew back from a business trip to California and spent the night at his home nearby. Now he has a site meeting with Alan Barlis of BarlisWedlick Architects. The two men are comrades in an ongoing quest to fulfill Miller's dreams of a private wellness retreat. Already completed is the property's centerpiece, where strength training with Indian clubs now awaits him, as do an indoor swimming pool and three expansive studios for tai chi, which he has practiced for decades. He's already dressed in navy sweats.

For Miller and Barlis, creating a place to nurture body and mind is only one aspect of the collaboration, however. It's also been an adventure in architectural appreciation, historic preservation, and adaptive reuse of a mid-century one-of-a-kind. The story starts in 1961 with Jens Quistgaard, the cookware and tableware company Dansk International Designs's longtime chief designer, completing a home for Dansk founder Ted Nierenberg's family. Quistgaard had imported Douglas fir timbers from his native Denmark and tucked the house amid rock outcroppings in a forest of maple and oak trees bordering the lake. He designed everything from the brass hardware on the doors to the sawtooth copper roof, a spiky crown floating in the tree canopy. Nierenberg then planted the picturesque, naturalistic gardens and documented them in photographs that were eventually gathered in a book, *The Beckoning Path: Lessons of a Lifelong Garden*. He died in 2009, but his widow was still living there ➤



Previous spread: In Armonk, New York, BarlisWedlick Architects converted a land-marked 1961 house by Jens Quistgaard into a private wellness retreat.

Opposite: An existing Douglas fir bridge leads to the main entrance.

Top: The bridge motif extends with the entry's version in Douglas fir and laminated, beaded low-iron glass. **Bottom:** Formerly gracing the living room, now bookending the central studio, fireplaces were updated with mantels in local bluestone.



Beanbag chairs by Ulla Koskinen dot the studio's refinished wengé floorboards.



when Miller, after a decade-long real-estate search, purchased the house in order to reinvent it as a retreat for himself and like-minded practitioners among his family and friends.

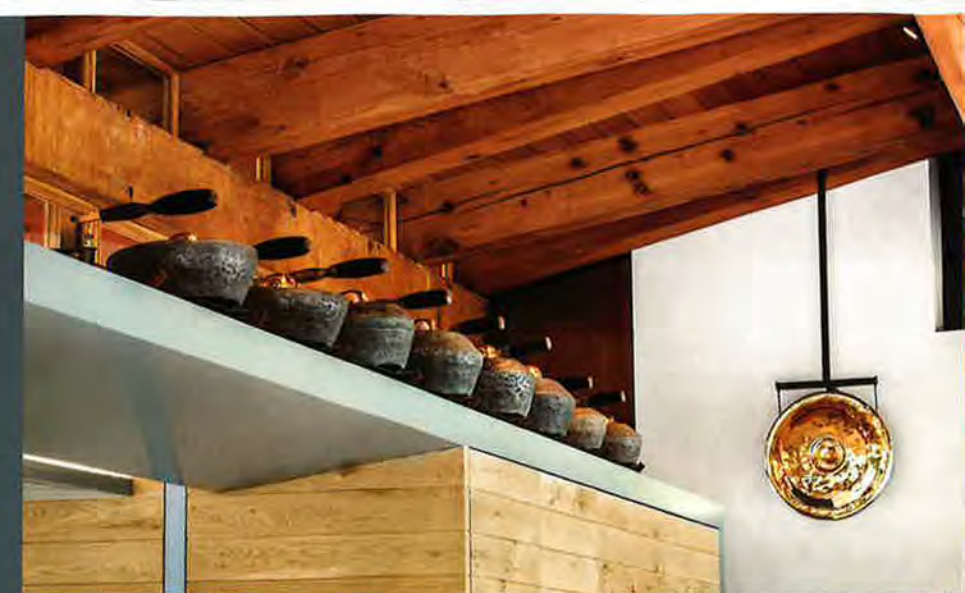
The main level, the upper one, originally rested uneasily on a smaller base, its brick face interrupted by arched mahogany trellises that Quistgaard based on a Dansk trivet. So Barlis removed the trellises and inserted them in bays elsewhere on the lower level. He then covered the brick with locally quarried granite that looks like it's emerging from the rock all around. He also extended the base—once bedrooms and a playroom for the Nierenberg children—to accommodate an indoor swimming pool, bringing total square footage to 8,000. While the base profited from addition, subtraction benefited the surprisingly dark upper level, re-envisioned as a light and airy glass pavilion. A spiral staircase and its enclosure were carefully extricated and stored for future use in the structures planned for the property. (Next on the agenda are a tearoom and guest quarters for a visiting Zen master.) Quistgaard's oak doors were temporarily removed before the space was gutted.

Barlis re-installed the original doors where possible. Elsewhere, pocket doors are usually left open to maintain a free flow as well as maximizing views of the landscape. Where the living room stood is now the central studio, a swath of space flanked by the original pair of woodburning fireplaces, their brick surrounds replaced by simple bluestone mantels set into white walls. To one side of the central studio, a smaller one doubles as a meeting or dining area—there's a kitchen right behind. The smaller studio on the other side can also be used by day as a lounge and by night as a bedroom, thanks to a king-size Murphy bed and an en suite bathroom. ➔

Opposite: Local granite conceals the original brick of the lower level.

Top: Bronze gongs belong to a kinetic sound sculpture by Aaron Taylor Kuffner. **Center:** Schist wraps custom kitchen cabinetry veneered in oak.

Bottom: A smaller studio can multifunction as a lounge or, with the help of a custom Murphy bed, a guest room.



Technology is very much present but rarely seen. Gongs—remote-controlled kinetic sound sculptures, more precisely—play commissioned compositions on demand. Gleaming copper paneling hides AV equipment sophisticated enough to produce professional-caliber videos of a teacher leading a class. “You sense the space, the light, nature, and materials, but you’re not distracted by things,” Barlis says.

Tech know-how aside, he’s an expert in Passive House design, but there was only so much he could do to improve the energy efficiency of the main level. Although he meticulously restored the timber framing and the mahogany window frames, sealing up cracks, the early-generation double-glazing wicks in the cold in winter and the heat in summer. And he admits that the large surface area of the roof is a “thermal nightmare, a perfect diagram of what *not* to do.” New skylights, installed to bring in more sunshine, don’t help matters. Fortunately, the rebuilt base has an excellent thermal barrier, courtesy of high-performance windows, heat-recovery ventilators, and rigid and spray-foam insulation. In addition to the pool extension, this level’s primary features are a gym and a theater well suited to showing instructional videos, perhaps including ones shot during a class above. There are also four monastically simple, modestly sized rooms for massage or meditation. *Namaste.* 🙏



Opposite: Bedrock was blasted to add 1,000 square feet for a swimming pool and hot tub.

Top: The 27 acres descend to a lake. **Bottom:** In a bathroom, gravel surrounds a solid-surfacing tub and bluestone pavers.



PROJECT TEAM

DOUG HUNTINGTON; ELAINE SANTOS; ANDREW LEFKOWITZ; ANDREW GARDNER; TIMOTHY HILDEBRAND-SEVERO; TAYLOR SMITH; BARLISWEDLICK ARCHITECTS. ARUP: LIGHTING CONSULTANT. DIGITAL HOME SYSTEMS: AUDIOVISUAL CONSULTANT. MARGIE RUDDICK LANDSCAPE: LANDSCAPING CONSULTANT. ROBERT SILMAN ASSOCIATES: STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS. STRUCTURAL ENGINEER. JMC PLANNING ENGINEERING: LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE & LAND SURVEYING. CIVIL ENGINEER. PETERSON ENGINEERING GROUP; MEP. CANDLEWOOD VALLEY BUILDING: WOODWORK: TRAYNER & COMPANY; PLASTERWORK. EESTAIRS: BRIDGE CONTRACTOR. HAGGERTY POOLS: POOL CONTRACTOR. TACONIC BUILDERS: GENERAL CONTRACTOR.

PRODUCT SOURCES

FROM FRONT: JOCKIMO: BRIDGE GLASS (ENTRY). BEAN PRODUCTS: CUSHIONS, MATS (STUDIO). WOODNOTES: BEANBAGS (STUDIOS). AURUBIS: PANELING. KOHLER CO.: SINK (KITCHEN). ROHL: SINK FITTINGS. MIELE: OVENS. WOLF: COOKTOP. FABER: HOOD. DURAT: TUB (BATHROOM). WATERMARK DESIGNS: TUB FITTINGS, SHOWER FITTINGS. 3FORM: PRIVACY PANELS. THROUGHOUT: ROCKY MOUNTAIN HARDWARE: WINDOW HARDWARE, DOOR HARDWARE. LED LINEAR; LEUCOS; TECH LIGHTING; WAC LIGHTING: CEILING FIXTURES. INTUS WINDOWS: CUSTOM WINDOWS, DOORS. SOLAR INNOVATIONS: CUSTOM SKYLIGHTS. AMERICAN CLAY: PLASTER.

